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# Dateline Saigon : the San Jose Mercury and San Jose News reports on the Tet Offensive, January-February 1968

Douglass Lee Chatfield  
*San Jose State University*

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**Chatfield, Douglass Lee, M.A.**

**San Jose State University, 1993**

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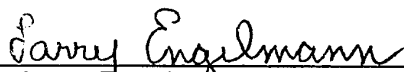
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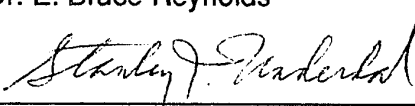
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By  
Douglass Lee Chatfield  
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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

  
Dr. Larry Engelmann

  
Dr. E. Bruce Reynolds

  
Dr. Stanley J. Underdal

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY



## ABSTRACT

### DATELINE SAIGON

By Douglass Lee Chatfield

This thesis addresses the local coverage of what many historians and journalists have labeled "the turning point" of the Vietnam War, 1968's Tet Offensive. It examines from an historical perspective the building up of American military might in Vietnam between the years 1963 and 1968 and the Communist strategy which ultimately led to the offensive.

Contrasted with the national and historic view of the war is a focused examination of the front page coverage of specific events in a local newspaper during the crucial first two months of 1968. This contrast demonstrates how the importance of an event is observed from different points of reference, and how such points of view could be at odds with each other.

The local newspaper chosen for the examination was the daily the San Jose Mercury, which on Sundays was published jointly with another newspaper as the San Jose Mercury-News. This newspaper was chosen for its large circulation distributed in a relatively small geographical area.



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## INTRODUCTION

With the approach of the New Year on January 1, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson would appear to have had reason to be optimistic. In spite of protests against many of his policies by vociferous students, a recent controversial tax increase, and a war which no longer received the support of the majority of Americans, Johnson still maintained a high approval rating among voters. Furthermore, the American war effort in Vietnam was reported to be prevailing, as the North Vietnamese forces appeared to be scattered and vulnerable. General William Westmoreland indicated that the enemy was on the run and that with immediate and substantial increases in men and materiel the war could be rushed to a favorable conclusion. The president could look forward to a victory in Vietnam which would bode favorably in his effort to be reelected in November.

Johnson's optimism would be short-lived, however, as within the first two months of the year his personal popularity and approval ratings plummeted as opposition to the war soared. By the end of March, Westmoreland was replaced in Vietnam and the president announced that he would not seek reelection. In the midst of these rapid changes was, ironically, a major military victory in which the United States' and South Vietnamese militaries successfully turned back a massive North Vietnam uprising which took place in over 140 locations throughout Vietnam. Unfortunately for Johnson the scope and tenacity of the uprising greatly affected confidence in the American effort in Vietnam which

served to accelerate the deterioration of public support for the war and the president. The massive Communist uprising was known as the Tet Offensive.

The degree to which public opinion with regard to the Vietnam War was affected by the media has long been a topic of debate. Although the Vietnam War has been referred to as the "first television war," newspapers across the nation had also made the war a mainstay of their front pages. In addition to the daily releases from the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), Reuters, and other wire services, by 1968 several newspapers and magazines had permanent Saigon bureaus as the number of American journalists assigned to the war mushroomed.

With a war in progress, and an ever increasing cadre of reporters to describe it, there was no shortage of stories to file. A correspondent, however, is only supposed to report what he knows, that is, what he sees and hears, and that which is reasonable or verifiable. Future information may prove his story to be false or incomplete.

This thesis explores the events of the Tet Offensive comparing current sources, which have the benefits of historical perspective and hindsight, along with documents, archival material, and government sources against those of 1968, particularly the San Jose Mercury and its sister newspaper, the San Jose News. Attention is also paid to editorials, polls, and balance of coverage immediately prior to, during, and immediately following the Tet Offensive. In so doing, the following questions will be addressed:

1. Did the Mercury attempt to report on all of the events of the Tet Offensive, or was the reporting limited to certain aspects? If

the reporting was limited, which types of stories were covered and which types were omitted?

2. Did the amount or nature of coverage of the war change?
3. What national and local trends in public opinion with regard to the war and President Johnson were reported during the first two months of 1968?
4. Was the Tet Offensive, as many journalists have suggested, a "turning point" of the war? If so, was it reflected as such on the front and editorial pages of the Mercury and Mercury-News?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to put the Tet Offensive in a proper context. To accomplish this, a brief overview of the war, emphasizing the United States' involvement in it from 1963 through 1967, has been provided. This history is followed by an analysis of the offensive itself. A diversity of sources ranging from domestic news reports of the time, government documents (including many classified during the war), published histories and memoirs, and captured enemy documents has been used in the analysis, the purpose of which is to establish a basis against which the actual front page coverage in San Jose's main print media can be compared.

The third, and final, major component of this thesis is an examination of the front page content of the San Jose Mercury and San Jose Mercury-News during the 60 day period at the beginning of 1968. This time frame affords an opportunity to examine the trends and emphases of local war coverage 30 days before and 30 days after the outbreak of the offensive, thereby allowing a determination of whether or not there were any immediate changes in the front page coverage caused by the Communist uprising. A review of the opinion-

editorial page in the weeks following the outbreak reveals how pundits saw the offensive as it occurred. Additionally, other issues such as the peace movement and the upcoming presidential election which affected either the evolution of the press' treatment or public opinion of the war during this time period are discussed.

Following the concluding chapter are appendices providing maps, charts, documents, and additional information to augment, graphically illustrate, or otherwise support the research and conclusions reached in this work which begins with a synopsis of events leading to the escalation of American involvement in the Vietnam war. This synopsis is entitled "The War So Far."

CHAPTER 1  
THE WAR SO FAR  
THE TUNNEL BEFORE THE LIGHT

No event during the 1960s commanded as much public attention as the Vietnam War. American involvement, which had been minimal at the beginning of the decade, expanded to the point that by decade's end over one half million United States' citizens were engaged in the Southeast Asian conflict. At the same time, media coverage of Vietnam evolved from the rare, usually brief, newspaper article filed by a Southeast Asia bureau correspondent to extensive coverage in all media provided by any number of the hundreds of television, newspaper, radio, and magazine correspondents who had descended on Saigon over the 10 years.

America's military presence in Vietnam became significant under President John Kennedy. It was during his administration that the initial buildup of advisors and military personnel in the small Southeastern Asian country grew to over 16,000. But even in the early stages of increased American presence, the president was beginning to show reservations about United States' involvement, particularly following the assassination of Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in early November 1963.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant to note, for example, that at this early juncture of the war, when American involvement consisted of only about 16,000 "advisors" and hard line rhetoric against Communist aggression was the norm for the administration, negative assessments regarding the prospects for the Vietnamese Civil War



were noted among high government officials, including the president himself. In an interview with Walter Cronkite on the "CBS Evening News" on 2 September 1963, President Kennedy told a national audience:

I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the Government to win popular support that the war can be won out there. In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it--the people of Viet-Nam [*sic.*]-against the Communists. We are prepared to continue to assist them, but I don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort, and, in my opinion, in the last two months the Government has gotten out of touch with the people.<sup>2</sup>

On 11 October 1963, President Kennedy authorized National Security Action Memorandum 263 which called for a troop withdrawal of 1000 men by the end of 1963. This was part of a strategy of disengagement from Vietnam which would be completed in 1965. The logistics for the withdrawal, which would reduce the number of active personnel in Vietnam from the October figure of 16,732 to 15,732 by year's end, were worked out and announced at a Honolulu conference attended by American Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of State Robert McNamara, State Department Official William Bundy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell Taylor, as well as other high ranking government and military officials, two days before Kennedy's assassination.<sup>3</sup>

Four days after taking office on 22 November 1963, President Johnson authorized National Security Administration Memorandum 273, which ostensibly reaffirmed Kennedy's commitments both to continued support of the anti-Communist government of South Vietnam and a phased withdrawal of troops. Nevertheless, it was under the provisions of NSAM 273 that in January

1964 the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed an expansion of intelligence operations, the rejection of "self imposed restrictions," and preparations "for whatever level of activity (that) may be required." Hence, NSAM 273 provided the means for reversing the trend toward withdrawal from Vietnam while paving the way for the escalation which was to follow.<sup>4</sup>

The concerns expressed by President Kennedy in September 1963 were echoed in December of that year by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara who, following a trip to Vietnam wrote to President Johnson: "The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a communist-controlled state."<sup>5</sup>

The practical upshot of these remarks is that concern about America's involvement in Vietnam, and its ability to win the war in that country, neither began with the first student anti-war activists, nor at some real or imagined "turning point," but at the highest levels of government prior to escalation. This concern was not, however, shared by the bulk of the Washington D.C. insiders nor by the military , and within a year of the death of President Kennedy, the next major step down the tunnel, at the end of which there seemed never to be a light, had occurred. That event was the Gulf of Tonkin Incident.

## THE GULF OF TONKIN

What actually transpired in the Gulf of Tonkin off the North Vietnamese coast between 2 August and 4 August 1964, has been the subject of speculation for nearly 25 years. What is known is that on the morning of 2 August, while completing a surveillance mission in North Vietnamese waters,

the destroyer U.S.S. Maddox was pursued by three torpedo boats traveling at about 50 knots. The crew of the Maddox tracked the pursuers on radar as the ship headed out to sea and its speed increased to 30 knots. As the attackers closed to within two kilometers, the Maddox fired upon them with its five-inch guns. The enemy returned fire with torpedoes and gunfire of its own. Meanwhile, aircraft from the carrier U.S.S. Ticonderoga, which was patrolling less than three hundred kilometers to the south, were summoned for air support. Three were already airborne, so they soon joined in the 20-minute skirmish. The engagement resulted in minor damage to the Maddox, and no casualties to the Americans, while two of the enemy craft were disabled and the third sunk.<sup>6</sup>

The following evening, shortly after a raid on the North Vietnamese radar station on Cape Vinh Son by a South Vietnamese patrol out of Da Nang, the Maddox, accompanied by the slightly newer and larger destroyer U.S.S. Turner Joy, and with precautionary air support from the carriers Ticonderoga and U.S.S. Constellation already aloft, once again entered North Vietnamese waters, this time baiting the Communists.<sup>7</sup>

On 4 August, the Maddox began to experience numerous electronic problems, most significantly with its sonar and IFF (Identify Friend or Foe) equipment. At the same time, the weather and atmospheric conditions of the area made radar unreliable at best. At about eight o'clock that evening a message received on the Maddox was interpreted to mean that the ship was under attack. Air cover quickly materialized, but no attackers were found in the area. Nevertheless, both the Maddox and Turner Joy commenced evasive action, maneuvering erratically and firing frantically at "targets" which were created by static on the radar and sonar screens. The only "target" positively

identified by the crew of the Maddox during the whole debacle turned out to be the Turner Joy, which had inadvertently pulled along side and was seconds away from being sunk when it identified itself.<sup>8</sup>

For President Johnson the actions in the Gulf of Tonkin proved a watershed in his administration. With the help of Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Johnson appealed to the Congress and the populace saying that action was needed. Literally overnight, support for the war effort skyrocketed. Pollsters showed that whereas in July 1964 58 per cent of the population was critical of Johnson's handling of the war, by mid-August the figure had reversed to show a 72 per cent approval rating. This turn of events was parlayed into the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which, in passing in the senate by a vote of 98-2, gave the president the authority "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the armed forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression," in essence to wage the war as he saw fit, without the interference of Congress. The boon in popularity with the voters likewise served Johnson well, as by trouncing presidential challenger Barry Goldwater in the general election three months later, the president assured himself of four more years to wage the war.<sup>9</sup>

In July 1964 the United States had a modest contingent of 16,000 troops in Vietnam. One week before the Gulf of Tonkin, Secretary of State Rusk discussed at a press conference the administration's plan for an increase of 5,000 troops. It was only a matter of days following Congress' empowering the president to wage war that men and materiel were being transferred from the United States, Japan, and the Philippines to Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, it

would not be until after the election that American involvement would really intensify.<sup>10</sup>

## ESCALATION

Less than one month after being sworn in for a full four-year term in office, President Johnson stepped up American involvement in Vietnam. American air raids in North Vietnam began in February with Operation "Flaming Dart." Operation "Rolling Thunder," a program of repeated saturation bombing in North Vietnam which would continue almost unabated for the next three years, commenced near the end of the month. Johnson's commitment to the war was also demonstrated by the influx of personnel. By year's end, the number of American personnel stationed in Vietnam had mushroomed to over 200,000.<sup>11</sup>

This period of escalation was not unpopular with the American people. Polls in November 1965 showed erstwhile unopinionated Americans rallying behind their president and supporting the war effort by a margin of well over two to one. (See Appendix C.) This marked the highest level of popularity the war was to attain, as by December the erosion of support, which would continue until the war's end, had already begun. The deterioration was such that by the end of 1967, more than a month before the Tet Offensive, there was more opposition to the war reported in the United States than support for it.<sup>12</sup>

Escalation continued throughout 1966. The number of American personnel in Vietnam doubled during the year, eventually exceeding 400,000.

Roughly another 100,000 would be added in 1967. As has been noted, there was diminishing support for the buildup.

Even as more Americans were being sent to Vietnam, the reason for their being there seemed to be becoming less clear. War strategists were severely limited as to where and when they could attack. Targets in North Vietnam were selected on a one-by-one basis and released by the Defense Department each week. Secretary of Defense McNamara, in a speech on 3 February 1966 described America's objectives as, "...not to destroy or to overthrow the communist government of China, or the communist government of North Vietnam. They are limited to the destruction of the insurrection and aggression directed by North Vietnam against the political institutions of South Vietnam...."<sup>13</sup>

The upshot of these objectives was that the allies' strategy was viewed as defensive. Even the saturation bombing in North Vietnam was carried out with periodic respites to allow the enemy an opportunity to come to the conference table. The perception became that the United States was not so much interested in winning the war as it was not to lose it while wearing down the enemy to a point of capitulation. To this end, "strategic hamlets" and other defensive outposts were established throughout the four sectors into which South Vietnam had been divided.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout 1966 and 1967 little changed as the war dragged on; the allies made little progress in terms of their objectives, as the Communists' presence in South Vietnam was not diminished.

It was in this period of uninspired strategy, unclear objectives, and flagging support and impatience for the war effort back home on the part of the

Americans that the Communists launched their largest and most comprehensive assault, an assault that would culminate with the Tet Offensive.

## MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE WAR

Concurrent with the increase of military personnel in Vietnam came an escalation of media coverage of the war, so that by 1968 the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon had become a major media center from whence emanated the reports which had become a daily fixture in both television and print media around the world. The influx of media personnel spawned the evolution of the two most important informational resources for American war correspondents: the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), a joint military-civilian press organization directed by former marine Barry Zorthian, and the Military Assistance Command Office of Information (MACOI), headed by Brig. Gen. Winant K. Sidle, which was the informational branch of the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam (MACV), roughly the inter-service equivalent of the JUSPAO.<sup>15</sup> These bureaucracies systematized the dissemination of information to the Saigon bureau staffers into the "Five O'clock Follies."

Every afternoon, officials from the MACOI would make the trip from their offices at Tan Son Nhut airport just outside Saigon to the JUSPAO building in downtown Saigon for a joint press briefing. In addition to the obvious conflicts of interest on the part of the government agencies distributing information, the "Five O'clock Follies" also proved to be very slow and inefficient during periods of rapid developments on the war front, such as occurred during the Tet Offensive. Despite the pejorative nickname, newsmen and women became

dependent on these highly controlled briefings for the bulk of their material, which was dutifully filed for mass distribution back in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

Little was done to ameliorate the situation. This was due at first to the relatively small size of the Vietnam press corps. Although between the end of December 1967 and 19 January 1968, the number of accredited American press personnel in Vietnam had more than doubled from 207 to 464, the complexities of the war remained difficult to analyze in the face of the newcomers' inexperience. Investigative reporting remained outside the scope of seasoned war journalists as none (or at least very few) ever learned any more than the most cursory skills in the Vietnamese language. Little help came from the government officials, many of whom shared with their media counterparts little sense of history or perspective and demonstrated scant interest beyond what was required to get them through their six-month to two-year stints overseas.<sup>17</sup>

If dependence on government sources and the lack of personnel, experience, and language skills were not enough, another factor which obfuscated the picture of the war being presented to the American people was that the truth of many of the major events of the war effort were not made public until years after they occurred. Examples of this included the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident which led directly to the American buildup, but which was not to undergo serious congressional or media scrutiny until February 1968; the My Lai massacre which took place on 16 March 1968, but did not lead to indictments of Lt. William Calley and other officers involved until November 1969; and a number of revelations regarding the management of the war from its beginning exposed by The Pentagon Papers in 1971.



Factors such as these beg the question: How complete and accurate was the Mercury-News' reporting and analysis of events as they occurred in Vietnam? In order to answer this question, a specific event, the Tet Offensive of 30 and 31 January 1968, was chosen and examined within a defined period of time allowing an equal number of days before and after the event, 1 January through 29 February 1968.

While the Tet Offensive and the media coverage of the event have been widely scrutinized for the past 25 years, by far the majority of the scrutiny has focused on television and its influence on the war. Evidence of the degree to which analysis of television's impact has dominated research on the war can be found in books by Don Oberdorfer (Tet! The Turning Point of the Vietnam War) and Peter Braestrup (Big Story), both newspaper journalists. While there is no question that television played a major part in creating the perceptions most Americans had of Vietnam, millions across the country also relied on newspapers for more in-depth information. For the majority of these people the newspaper of choice was not one of the major publications such as the New York Times or the Washington Post, which have also been subjects of no small amount of scholarship, but their relatively anonymous hometown or regional papers. For residents of San Jose, the hometown newspaper was the San Jose Mercury and its sister newspaper the San Jose News.

This examination of the Mercury-News' coverage of the Tet Offensive will compare the events of the time period as reconstructed from a variety of sources such as monographs, books, articles, captured enemy documents, unpublished notes, and personal interviews with what was published on the newspaper's front and opinion-editorial pages. The foci of the investigation will be accuracy,

completeness, and changes in the nature of the coverage. Public opinion trends viewed in light of war reporting, while only obliquely related to the foci, will also be addressed for illustrative purposes.<sup>18</sup>

In discussing the Tet Offensive in particular, some background information is essential.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER 1

## MEDIA COVERAGE BEFORE THE TET OFFENSIVE

<sup>1</sup>William J. Rust, Kennedy in Vietnam (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 179-180. During the last few months of his administration, President Kennedy made a number of inconsistent statements regarding Southeast Asia. What is known is that less than three months after President Johnson took office, Operation Rolling Thunder was under way. Some researchers cite Kennedy's failure to actively promote an aggressive policy against the Communist regime of North Vietnam as a provocation which ultimately led to the assassination of the president. This controversial scenario provided a basis for the Oliver Stone motion picture JFK (Warner Brothers, 1991).

<sup>2</sup>United States Department of Defense, United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967, Book 3, (Washington D.C.: GPO), IV. B. 5. 23. The 12-volume Department of Defense compilation of strategy and documents is commonly referred to as The Pentagon Papers.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Dale Scott, The War Conspiracy (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1972), 220-222; and United States Department of Defense, IV. B. 4. 16; IV. B. 5. xxxiii, 65.

<sup>4</sup>Scott, 221.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, IV. B. 4. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph C. Goulden, Truth is the First Casualty (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1969), 122-132; and Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986), 367.

<sup>7</sup>Karnow, 370.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*; Goulden, 146-147.

<sup>9</sup>Goulden, 13, 77.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 235-236.

<sup>11</sup>Karnow, 682.

<sup>12</sup>John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), 54-56. With his extensive use of charts, graphs, and analysis, Mueller calls a number of popularly held notions concerning support for both the Korean and Vietnam war into question. A number of the more illuminating graphs from this book have been reprinted in Appendix C.

<sup>13</sup>Wilbur H. Morrison, The Elephant and the Tiger, (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990), 216.

<sup>14</sup>The four sections were I Corps, II Corps, III Corps, and IV Corps. I Corps was located near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) which separated North from South Vietnam. Hue and Khe Sanh were located in this section. II Corps, immediately south of I Corps, was by far the largest of the four sections. It included the Central Highlands, Pleiku, Dak To, Ban Me Thuot, Da Lat, and a number of other key cities and battle sites. III Corps, the smallest of the four sections, included the city of Saigon. Finally, IV Corps, the southernmost of the sections, was the site of a number of battles during the Tet Offensive, such as those at Ben Tre, Vin Long, and Can Tho. The four sections are depicted in the maps in Appendix A.

<sup>15</sup>Peter Braestrup, Big Story, abridged and updated ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 11-13.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 13-17.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-11; Bernard Kalb, personal interview with author, Washington D.C., June 4, 1990. A CBS correspondent in Vietnam in the 1950's and 1960's, Kalb could recall none of his colleagues learning Vietnamese, but conceded that there may have been one or two who did. Braestrup, meanwhile, cites the increase of press personnel as being reflective of the military escalation, which over time appears to be a valid assessment. No reason was given, however, for the dramatic influx of new correspondents at this specific point in time.

<sup>18</sup>The importance of the media in the shaping of public opinion (or vice versa) regarding the Vietnam is a topic which has long been the subject of debate. Media critics have posited that "liberal" media turned the nation against the war, which in turn led to series of events culminating in America's withdrawal from the conflict. Members of the press corps, including Kalb and Stanley Karnow, argue that as it became more clear that the United States was not making the anticipated progress *vis a vis* the war, people back home became more disillusioned. Any increase in "negative" reporting was merely a reflection of this disillusionment.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE WINTER-SPRING OFFENSIVE

Those North Vietnamese led actions which we commonly refer to as the Tet Offensive were really the manifestation of the second phase of a three-phase winter-spring campaign of 1967-1968 which had begun with Phase I in October of 1967. In the initial phase of the campaign, which ran from October through December, the Communists engaged in relatively large battles against strategic allied installations.<sup>1</sup>

The second phase of the campaign employed a different strategy from the first. Instead of strategic pitched battles, the North Vietnamese chose to launch a "general offensive" (*Tong cong kich*) featuring a large number of simultaneous attacks throughout the country. Strategic assaults, such as those on radio stations, airports, and the United States Embassy in Saigon, were launched as part of the overall attack, but, as will be shown, these attacks were generally undertaken by small units of North Vietnamese guerrillas and were, for the most part, quickly put down. The most important goal of the second phase of the Winter-Spring Offensive was not victory, rather the laying of the groundwork for the third phase of the offensive which was scheduled to commence in April 1968 and run through June of that year.<sup>2</sup>

At the heart of the strategy for the third phase of the campaign was the North Vietnamese belief that as a result of the assaults on South Vietnamese cities and towns, the people of South Vietnam would rally to the cause of the North, and a "general uprising" (*tong khoi nghia*) would follow. This "general

uprising," would cause a collapse of the South Vietnamese government which would, in turn, effectively end the war in the North's favor. In assessing the strategy, General William Westmoreland predicted that this phase of the offensive would begin in Quang Tri, Thua Thien province. Although the North did eventually emerge victorious in the war, it is noteworthy that at no time did the "general uprising" anticipated in the third phase materialize.<sup>3</sup>

### PHASE I

Defense Minister General Vo Nguyen Giap is considered to be among the finest military strategists of the twentieth century. It was he who engineered the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu which ultimately led to France's withdrawal from Vietnam in the early fifties.<sup>4</sup> The significance of the 1954 victory was not lost on Giap, who was able to use the battle not only to achieve his immediate military goals, but also both to establish a reputation for himself as a strategist and to provide fodder for psychological warfare some fourteen years later.

Giap's battle plan beginning in late 1967 was to make use of two fighting tactics: an "independent fighting method" (*doc lap cach danh*), and a "coordinated fighting method" (*hop dong cach danh*). These two strategies were described by Giap himself in Big Victory Great Task (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1967) in which the general also described a situation, later referred to as the "Dien Bien Phu Gambit," in which the two methods would be used together. The former method, which was used extensively during the second phase of the Winter-Spring Offensive, called for dozens of small-scale guerrilla-type attacks. Attacks of this nature were not designed to achieve

victory, but to pester the enemy and to shake his self-confidence. Typical of Giap's strategies, high casualties were considered acceptable. It was the latter strategy, however, which Giap employed in the implementation of the first phase of the Winter-Spring Offensive.<sup>5</sup>

During the course of the first phase of the offensive, the North Vietnamese commenced attacks in four areas controlled by the South and her allies. These included positions as follows: first, near Dak To in northern Kontum Province; second, the area around southern I Corps including Quangtin and Quangngai provinces and northern II Corps in Binhdin province; third, in Phuc Long and Binh Long provinces north of Saigon along the Cambodian border; and fourth, southwest of Saigon in Dinh Tuong province. (Locations of I, II, III, and IV Corps and South Vietnamese provinces are illustrated in Appendix A--Maps.) Although the four assaults were planned as preparatory strikes for the second phase of the offensive, and therefore shared some common objectives, each had a separate immediate goal as well.<sup>6</sup>

Among the objectives shared during this phase of the offensive were the securing of real estate, inflicting of casualties on the government of South Vietnam, and, most importantly, the luring of large numbers of troops from the United States, South Vietnam, and the other allied nations from the cities to rather remote areas mostly near the border areas of Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia.<sup>7</sup> The rationales behind the first two objectives are obvious enough, but it was the third objective which was most crucial in this phase of the offensive because only by extending the Allies' security systems could sapper units, which were to carry out the second phase, prove most effective.<sup>8</sup>

Examples of objectives exclusive to specific areas of assault included the recapturing of previously sympathetic populations in southern I Corps and northern II Corps and the capturing of the major South Vietnamese artery, Highway 4, which ran through IV Corps in the Mekong River delta.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, it was later discovered that the 3 November 1967 attack on Loc Ninh in III Corps was not designed, as originally thought, to provide publicity which would overshadow the installation of General Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky as President and Vice President, respectively, of South Vietnam, but instead it sought to afford the North Vietnamese the opportunity to experiment with new sapper unit guerrilla tactics and to test South Vietnamese defenses. Furthermore, the assault on Loc Ninh would provide the North with intelligence concerning the amount of firepower which would be required in order to capture and maintain population centers.<sup>10</sup>

In the field, the North Vietnamese were repelled in every attack undertaken during Phase I of their Winter-Spring Offensive. However, this period also saw a number of significant developments which would prove of great interest to both sides.

The first development was the capture of an enemy document on 6 November near Dak To in Kontum Province which outlined the North Vietnamese strategy:

- To annihilate a major U.S. element in order to force the enemy to deploy as many additional troops to the Western Highlands as possible and to destroy or disintegrate a large part of the Puppet Army.

- To encourage units to improve, in combat, the technique of concentrated attacks in order to annihilate relatively large enemy units.



- To destroy much of the enemy force, to liberate an important area and strengthen the base area, thus providing support for the political struggle movement.

- To effect close coordination with various battle areas throughout South Vietnam in order to achieve timely unity and stratagems.<sup>11</sup>

The second development was the capture of another enemy document on 19 November 1967 which was announced by the United States Mission in Vietnam in a press release on 5 January 1968. This was a personal notebook signed by Vu Sinh Vien (who gave no rank and little indication as to the capacity in which he served the North Vietnamese, although it was determined that his capacity was a relatively minor one). The notebook, which was captured in Quang Tin province, where both North Vietnamese Regular Army and Viet Cong activity had been observed, stated that for the first time the North Vietnamese were preparing attacks on Saigon, and that the general offensive and uprising, which would comprise the final phase of the war was "within reach."<sup>12</sup> The notebook included language which unequivocally and unambiguously read: "The central headquarters has ordered the entire army and people of South Vietnam to implement general offensive and general uprising in order to achieve a decisive victory...." It was perhaps due to the apparent minor role of the writer, or perhaps overconfidence on the part of the allies, that the document's warning, while attracting widespread interest, led to very little action.<sup>13</sup>

The third event, and the first of the presidential election year in the United States, was one which was to begin a string of events culminating in the lengthy siege of Khe Sanh. This, while not technically part of the Tet Offensive was, by dint of its chronology and psychological importance, to become inexorably linked with it.

On the evening of 2 January 1968 guards at the United States Marine base at Khe Sanh were alerted to the presence of intruders by a sentry dog. When the guards went to investigate they found six men dressed in United States Marine uniforms walking nonchalantly outside the defensive perimeter of the base. After Marine Second Lieutenant Nile B. Buffington's repeated attempts to get the men to identify themselves were ignored, the marines opened fire on them. In the gunfire which followed five of the six men were killed. Three of the men were identified as a North Vietnamese regimental commander, an operations officer, and a communications officer. The audacity of the six men led the marines to believe that the North Vietnamese were planning some activity in the area. Unfortunately, any further clues to North Vietnamese intent were lost with the escape of the sixth man. Two days later a report that two regiments of the North Vietnamese 304th Division had moved to the mountainous area just southwest of Khe Sanh was received. In subsequent weeks additional information surfaced of northern troop movement in the area. On 21 January 1968, the North Vietnamese attacked and the siege of Khe Sanh began (See below).<sup>14</sup>

Another development causing concern for the allied forces at the beginning of 1968 was the dissemination of data showing a sharp reduction of Viet Cong defections from November to December 1967. Pentagon figures of defectors to the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) program showed that only 951 persons came into the program in December as compared to 1,070 in November. The figure for December marked the eighth decrease in such defectors in nine months since the high water mark of 4,913 defectors in March.<sup>15</sup>

In attempting to explain why the numbers of defectors had fallen so dramatically over the previous nine months, Johnson administration officials gave the following reasons:

- Speculation that a negotiated settlement to the war was forthcoming, leading people to wait longer before taking a position;

- North Vietnamese terrorism and threats of violence to deter defections;

- Lack of confidence in the new Thieu-Ky regime;

- Viet Cong propaganda that defectors would be killed by the South Vietnamese;

- Fear of family separation at Tet;

- The upcoming rice harvest; and,

- More accurate, realistic defector statistics.<sup>16</sup>

In addition there was speculation that portions of the population were privy to the machinations of the North in terms of the overall offensive which had begun in October, and were therefore reticent to ally themselves with the South.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, in Washington, on 6 January 1968, the Associated Press released a story in which editorials from several major newspapers (including the New York Times, Boston Globe, Chicago Sun-Times, and Los Angeles Times) critical of the administration's policy of bombing in North Vietnam were cited. The article, one of a growing number of articles critical of administration's conduct of the war, called for a halt to the bombing until such time as it could be determined if North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh was earnest in his call for the commencement of peace talks.<sup>18</sup> North Vietnam used this growing criticism by the American media in its propaganda. Additionally,

North Vietnamese correspondents reported on the "Nam Bac Incident," which described the "illegal" entry into Laos by nine battalions of American-backed mercenaries in mid-January.<sup>19</sup>

Controversy over American activities in Asia was heightened on 22 January (Korean time) when the U.S.S. Pueblo, which was on a surveillance mission for the Central Intelligence Agency was captured by North Korea. The capture of the ship proved a great embarrassment for the administration and raised a series of new questions concerning the government's involvement abroad.<sup>20</sup> Under these circumstances the administration had reason to hope that the cease-fire called to commemorate the lunar new year, Tet, would provide at least a brief respite in Vietnam.

### THE CEASE-FIRE

Cease-fires were not uncommon during the Vietnam War. The Communists in the north proclaimed the first cease-fires of the war in 1963, declaring that Christmas, Buddha's birthday, New Year's Day (western), and Tet would be times during which a truce would be observed. In 1965 the government in Saigon reciprocated with cease-fire declarations for each of these dates, and the coming of these dates brought the anticipation of a brief respite for the combatants on both sides. Nevertheless, from their inceptions the cease-fires were fraught with allegations of misconduct and malintent by both sides. This trend was to be unaltered as 1967 ended and 1968 began.<sup>21</sup>

The new year was ushered in with the traditional New Year's cease-fire proposal. As always, the length of the cease-fire was under constant revision.

Both sides ultimately acquiesced to a 36-hour truce. Shortly before the cease-fire began, a Viet Cong ambush of a column of United States armored personnel carriers brought a brief flurry of activity. Speculation at the time was that the Viet Cong were attempting to embarrass the United States by pointing out a violation (although the use of the word "violation" would be strictly eschewed by both sides) of the cease-fire agreement by the moving of material during the truce. This was the same charge the allies had made against the North during the Christmas cease-fire only one week earlier.<sup>22</sup>

During the course of the New Year cease-fire, "incidents" between the two sides, including 32 in the first 12 hours of the truce, and 177 overall, had resulted in the deaths of 27 Americans and 44 South Vietnamese. Additionally, 337 allied troops had been wounded. On the other side of the coin, the official count of enemy killed was 553. Of course, each side accused the other of causing the incidents, so it was not unusual for clashes to be between two "defensive" patrols.<sup>23</sup>

Critics throughout the war referred to allegations and figures such as these to demonstrate the pointlessness of the cease-fires. It was commonly accepted that both sides made use of the relative lulls to move men and equipment with a greater degree of security than would otherwise prevail. One general went as far as to assert that in the context of the Vietnam War, a cease-fire was, "...a pro rather than anti-war measure. They simply allow[ed] both sides to get set for heavy fighting ahead." The veracity of this statement had been borne out almost without exception during the previous three years, with many of the largest clashes of the war to date taking place immediately after the conclusion of a cease-fire.<sup>24</sup>

On 8 January 1968, the United States embassy published a captured document which cast further light on the nature of cease-fires. The 16 December 1967 document from "The Military Affairs Committee of F3" to "Various armed Forces, three types of troops [Main Forces, Local Forces and Guerrillas] in the Province, various branches and agencies" gives orders to the various cadres and soldiers as to conduct during the forthcoming cease-fires for Christmas, New Year, and Lunar New Year. In addition to admonishing the recipients of the communiqué to "absolutely comply with the cease fire order" on the applicable days and calling for constantly being alert and "in a state of combat readiness," as well as "determined to counter-attack and annihilate" the enemy if provoked, the document also instructs the command cadre to: "...make the most advantageous use of the truce periods to urgently transport supplies, prepare the battlefield, and train the troops in the shortest possible time with the available facilities, This will ensure the successful implementation of our combat strategic plans."<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the harsh criticisms and realities of the cease-fires, Hanoi Radio announced that the Viet Cong planned to observe a seven-day cease-fire during the lunar New Year. This cease-fire was to take place from 1 a.m. 27 January to 1 a.m. 3 February Saigon time.<sup>26</sup> Shortly thereafter, Saigon, which had announced a 48-hour cease-fire for the celebration of *Mau Than* (The Year of the Monkey) issued an announcement that the length of the truce would be reduced to 36-hours commencing at 6:00 p.m. 29 January and ending at 6:00 a.m. 31 January.<sup>27</sup>

Less than a week before the new year, the Hanoi Domestic Service broadcast instructions on the celebration of Tet in which the General Staff and

Directorate General warned that because the Tet holiday would occur at a time when fighting was particularly heavy, all categories of troops and military units must:

...properly organize the celebration of Tet under all circumstances in order to develop among the troops a spirit of optimism, enthusiasm, confidence, joy, solidarity, thriftiness [*sic.*] vigilance, combat readiness, and a determination to completely defeat U.S. aggression.<sup>28</sup>

The instructions furthermore called for the raising of the "spirit of vigilance and readiness" while calling on the troops to "smash all sabotage activities of the enemy."<sup>29</sup>

Two days later, on 23 January, as the date of the cease-fire drew nearer, the North offered the first salvoes in the battle of accusations of impropriety during the cease-fire with a report that the Johnson administration was already preparing to accuse the Democratic Republic of Vietnam of sending military aid southward during the time of truce. In substantiating its assertion, Hanoi cited similar accusations during previous cease-fires and added that by making such accusations, the United States could continue its bombing of the North unabated under the pretense that the incursions were merely reconnaissance missions or were undertaken to prevent the DRV from bringing supplies into the south.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the North's most energetic diversion of the war was beginning at Khe Sanh.

The siege at Khe Sanh would last two months and was a superb example of the United States misinterpreting North Vietnamese intentions. The United States, forewarned that the North Vietnamese were planning incursions into the area (see above) and possessing information that there had been an increase in northern activity along the Ho Chi Mihn trail in Laos and Cambodia,

had increased the number of bombing missions into those bordering countries. Nevertheless, the Communists were able to muster an assault force on Khe Sanh, and on 21 January 1968 a mortar and artillery attack began.<sup>31</sup>

The allied leaders, including President Johnson and General Westmoreland, believed Khe Sanh was to be the 1968 equivalent of Dien Bien Phu. Westmoreland furthermore saw Khe Sanh as an opportunity to engage the enemy in a decisive battle. The camp was therefore to be defended at all costs. Immediately after the barrage began, Westmoreland on 22 January sent Lt. Col. John F. Mitchell and the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines to the base to reinforce the 26th Regiment already stationed there. Other reinforcements would soon follow.<sup>32</sup>

To the North Vietnamese, the battle of Khe Sanh meant something very different. Whereas Dien Bien Phu had proven to be a conclusive battle, Khe Sanh was to be nothing of the sort. This was because the United States' military presence in South Vietnam was greater than France's had been in 1954. Khe Sanh was seen rather as the final and most extensive diversion staged in preparation for the Tet uprising. That the United States allowed the battle to serve as a touchstone of American prestige also served General Giap's strategy.<sup>33</sup>

Although to the Communists Khe Sanh was just a diversion, it was an important one. Evidence of its importance was the extraordinarily high number of casualties accepted by the enemy. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units suffered losses of up to ninety per cent. Total casualties for the Communists totaled over 10,000 while the United States suffered fewer than 5,000. It is almost parenthetical that the denouement of the siege in early April was



inconclusive with the Communists discontinuing the assault and the United States abandoning the base. What is important was that Westmoreland fell into what a marine commander at Khe Sanh, Maj. Gen. Lowell English, called a "trap" designed "to force...the expenditure of absolutely unreasonable amounts of men and materiel to defend a piece of terrain that wasn't worth a damn."<sup>34</sup>

As the two sides began entrenching for the siege at Khe Sanh, the people of Vietnam began to prepare for the rapidly approaching celebration of the lunar new year.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER TWO

## WINTER-SPRING OFFENSIVE

<sup>1</sup>Douglas Pike, Viet Cong Strategy of Terror (Saigon: United States Mission in Vietnam, 1969), 24-25.

<sup>2</sup>General William Westmoreland, "Transcript of General Westmoreland's Press Briefing, 1 February 1968," Vietnam Press Number 4403, Saigon, 3 February 1968, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Pike, 25.

<sup>4</sup>Although most sources concur that Gen. Giap was a brilliant military leader, he is not without his critics. One of the more scathing criticisms of Giap was that North Vietnamese propaganda led many Americans to accept the "Giap mystique," that he "made many mistakes, and that his armies suffered enormous casualties that would have forced the removal of an American commander under similar circumstances." See Morrison, 375.

<sup>5</sup>Pike, "The Tet Offensive and the Escalation of the Vietnam War; 1965-1968: View From Hanoi" paper prepared for Presentation at the Symposium on the 1968 Tet Offensive by the Curriculum in Peace, War and Defense, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C., 21 February 1978, CRS 18-20.

<sup>6</sup>Associated Press Wire Service, "Westmoreland on Red Strategy," Washington Post, February 2, 1968, 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Morrison, 375.

<sup>9</sup>Westmoreland, 5-6.

<sup>10</sup>Morrison, 375-376.

<sup>11</sup>Don Oberdorfer, Tet!: The Turning Point of the Vietnam War, (New York: De Capo Books, 1971), 107-108, 341. In order to support a thesis that the strategy employed by General Giap during the Winter-Spring offensive included an attempt to resurrect his success at Dien Bien Phu, Oberdorfer attempts to draw parallels between the 1954 battle and the events of early 1968. To this

end Oberdorfer points out that just as the Viet Mihn had chosen Dak To in Kontum province as the point to begin the push which would ultimately lead to France's defeat, the Viet Cong in 1968 chose Dak To as one the four key sites of their winter-spring campaign. For a parallel for Dien Bien Phu itself, Oberdorfer's thesis is that it was to be Khe Sanh.

<sup>12</sup>"Captured Document Indicates Final Phase of Revolution at Hand," United States Mission in Vietnam Press Release, Saigon, 5 January 1968, File A, Date 11 [sic]/68, Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA. Documentation of materials from the Indochina Archives is sometimes inconsistent or inaccurate. References given here are complete as provided by the archives.

<sup>13</sup>William M Hammond, Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968, (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1988), 342.

<sup>14</sup>Oberdorfer, 109.

<sup>15</sup>George C. Wilson, "VC Defection Not Reaching Predictions," Washington Post, 14 January 1968, A1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., A18.

<sup>17</sup>That this could be the case could be inferred from other examples of South Vietnamese civilians demonstrating a foreknowledge of North Vietnamese plans. For instance, many American correspondents were admonished by servants not to leave their quarters on the evening that the second phase of the Winter-Spring offensive was to begin. An American officer furthermore attested that on the same day Tan Son Nhut airport was saved by a warning from a little Vietnamese boy to whom the troops gave cigarettes when he cautioned them to, "watch out tonight, or they would all be dead." Not everybody with this type of information was quite as forthcoming, however. The same officer also mentioned that troops from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) stationed next door to the Americans withdrew without telling their neighbors. See "Traveller's Tales," Far Eastern Economic Review, 7 March 1968, 407.

<sup>18</sup>Associated Press, "Many Papers Urge Halt to Bombing," Washington Post, 7 January 1968, 1.

<sup>19</sup>Hanoi Domestic Service in Vietnamese, "Vietnam, Other Setbacks Cause Fever in U.S.," 3, File Asia, Date 2/68, Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA. (Published as an unsigned article, "An Acute Fit of Fever in Washington," in Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 18 February 1968.)

<sup>20</sup>Braestrup, 49.

<sup>21</sup>Herbert Y. Schandler, The Unmaking of a President, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 71-72. On page 70 of Tet!: The Turning Point of the Vietnam War, Don Oberdorfer writes that while the annual cease-fires came to be accepted in theory as standard operating procedure, in practice they were not. Oberdorfer furthermore likens the truces to the Catholic Church's Truce of God during the Crusades in the 11th century wherein the bishops at first forbade fighting on Sundays. The bishops later extended the cease-fires over long weekends, as well as during Lent and Advent and on Holy Days. The Truce of God was finally abandoned when its interference with warfare became too great.

<sup>22</sup>Reuters, "Fighting Slows as Truce Begins," Washington Post, 1 January 1968, A1.

<sup>23</sup>R. W. Apple, "Truces and Disillusion-- Feeling Grows in Vietnam That Lulls For Holidays Are Almost Meaningless," New York Times, 5 January 1968, 1.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>"Captured Document Indicates Viet Cong Plan to Take Advantage of Cease-fire," United States Mission in Vietnam Press Release, 8 January 1968, File A, Date 1/68, Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA.

<sup>26</sup>"Hanoi Keeps Plan for Tet Truce But Warns US," Washington Star, 15 January 1968, 1.

<sup>27</sup>"36-Hour Truce Set Throughout Country," Saigon, Vietnam Press in English, 21 January 1968, File W, Date 1/68, Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA.

<sup>28</sup>"Instructions Issued on the Celebration of Tet," Hanoi Domestic Service in Vietnamese, 0430 GMT, 21 January 1968, File W, Date 1/68, Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>"U.S. Will Accuse Hanoi of Truce Violations," Hanoi Correspondent's Dispatch to Prensa Latina, Havana, 1119 GMT, 23 January 1968, File W, Date 1/68, Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA.

<sup>31</sup>Morrison, 382.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 382-383.

<sup>33</sup>Karnow, 541-542.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 540, 542.

CHAPTER 3  
THE OFFENSIVE BEGINS  
TET

The celebration of the Lunar New Year, or Tet, is the largest of the year in Vietnam. In attempting to underscore the importance to the Vietnamese of Tet, the celebration was described in a 1965 pamphlet to American GIs as, "a combination of All Souls' Day, a family celebration, a spring festival, a national holiday and an overall manifestation of a way of life...."<sup>1</sup> Washington Post Foreign Service Correspondent Lee Lescaze wrote that Vietnamese Tet:

...is all holidays in one. During the three days, there is a time to eat and drink, a time to pray, a time for family and friends and for the settling of accounts. Tet is serious without being solemn and gay without being frivolous.<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, Lescaze, in the same article describing the joys of Tet, wrote optimistically of how cease-fires, while often violated, were often a time for friendly interactions between South Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, and mentioned that the only workers who would have to work overtime during the festival were the police who would have to work two to four extra hours per shift in order to "cope with traffic jams and guard against robberies and terrorism."<sup>3</sup>

The assumption that the importance of the celebration of Tet would preclude the undertaking of any large scale mission would be one which could only be made in ignorance of Vietnamese history. One of the most important battles in the nation's history was launched on Tet, 1789, when Nguyen Hue (Quang Trung) surprised the Chinese occupying Saigon. Like their twentieth century Communist counterparts, Nguyen Hue's followers celebrated Tet

outside of Hanoi a few days early so that they could attack their foreign opponents during the holiday itself. In the battle, Nguyen proved victorious, and he became the emperor of a unified Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

In 1968, the actual date of the Lunar New Year was 30 January. It was on this day that the three-day celebrations in Saigon, as well as the South Vietnamese cease-fire, were scheduled to commence. The Communist-proclaimed cease-fire, however, had begun two days earlier. As with previous cease-fires, the one announced by the Viet Cong was short-lived. On the morning of 27 January, less than a half hour after the truce began, the guerrillas shelled the Trangdang government subdistrict headquarters west of Saigon.<sup>5</sup>

The shelling of the headquarters was followed shortly by a small attack on Khe Sanh. Meanwhile, intelligence sources reported that four or five enemy divisions totaling 40,000 to 50,000 Communist troops as well as additional support units were active in Laos south of the demilitarized zone not far from Khe Sanh. Fearing a large-scale offensive against Khe Sanh, South Vietnamese and U.S. officials canceled the Tet truce in the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam and began sending reinforcements from the cities to Khe Sanh. The sources also announced that bombing in North Vietnam would continue throughout the Tet holiday.<sup>6</sup>

Outside of I and II Corps the 36-hour truce announced by the allies remained, but, wary of Communist activities, General Westmoreland placed U.S. troops on "full alert."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of apprehension concerning enemy activities along the Ho Chi Mihn trail, the mood in Saigon was one of optimistic anticipation of the New Year.

## PHASE II BEGINS

The actual Communist offensive was to commence late in the evening on 30 January and early on the morning of 31 January, however, due apparently to a breakdown in communication, several elements of the operation began in I and II Corps 24 hours early.

At 12:30 on the morning of 30 January 1968 (Saigon time), just one-half hour into the Year of the Monkey, the first shots of the Tet Offensive were fired. An interesting aspect of this was that these first shots were, in fact, fired by a South Vietnamese Corporal named Le Van Thang, who opened fire after witnessing some suspicious activity outside the government radio station in Nha Trang, on the coast in II Corps.<sup>8</sup>

The men at whom Thang was shooting returned fire, and five minutes later the Communists began a mortar attack on the nearby Vietnamese Navy Training Center. In what would be a harbinger of things to come, not a single round hit its target, and the 800 Communist support troops sent to the city of 119,000 were slow to materialize. Four North Vietnamese agents were able to infiltrate a logistical headquarters and the province administrative headquarters, but they were all killed by a United States air strike which set the headquarters on fire. By mid-afternoon on 30 January, the enemy had been routed and the city was declared "clear." By this time, 377 North Vietnamese troops had been killed (as compared with 88 friendlies) and 77, including Communist Party Political Officer Huyhn Tuong, had been captured. In short, for the attackers, Nha Trang had been a disaster.<sup>9</sup>



Nha Trang was not the only site at which the Communists attacked on the morning of 30 January. Before dawn, assaults had been launched on a number of locations including Ban Me Thuot, Kontum, Hoi An, Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Pleiku, Tuy Hoa, Ninh Hoa, Phu Loc, and Duy Xuyen. For the most part, these attacks followed the course of the fight at Nha Trang. Troops of attackers, usually numbering one to three battalions, which were quickly turned away.<sup>10</sup> A few of the battles begun on the first morning of Phase II, however, lasted a bit longer before the Communists were defeated.

Examples of sites where the Communists were quickly defeated included the airfields at Tuy Hoa and Da Nang, the towns of Hoi An, Phu Loc, and Ninh Hoa, and the military headquarters, and railroad, radio, and police stations at Qui Nhon, where the fighting lasted less than one day.<sup>11</sup> Fighting was more protracted in some of the other sites, particularly at Ban Me Thuot, where final search and clear operations were not completed by the allies until 6 February. During the fighting at Ban Me Thuot the Communists also demonstrated a degree of brutality by expanding the scope of their attack from military and police installations, destroying two churches, missionary buildings, and a leprosarium.<sup>12</sup>

Because it took the allied forces as long as a week to secure Ban Me Thuot, it was an exception to the rule of easy victories for the allies in assaults initiated the first day of Tet. The other attacks of 30 January, should have been seen as an omen of the greater offensive which was to take place the following morning, but President Thieu, for one, did not see them as such, and continued with his plans of leaving Saigon on the afternoon of the 30th for My Tho to spend the Tet holiday with his family. For his part, General Westmoreland was

somewhat more perceptive. With support from Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Westmoreland was able to prevail upon President Thieu to cancel the 36-hour truce before the president left for the Mekong Delta.<sup>13</sup>

Most of fighting begun on the first day of the offensive was over by the time the major thrust of Phase II of the Winter-Spring Offensive began in earnest. By nightfall, on 31 January 1968, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Armies would pour approximately 84,000 troops into 36 of the 44 provincial capitals, five of the six autonomous cities, sixty-four of the 242 district capitals, and 50 hamlets.<sup>14</sup> For the most part, the assaults resembled the ill-fated forays undertaken on 30 January; however, the second wave of Phase II assaults also involved some attacks which would have resounding repercussions throughout Vietnam as well as the United States.

The attacks of the second morning resembled those of the first. They were characterized by small groups of sappers, often hopelessly outnumbered, leading ubiquitous assaults against air installations, military headquarters, governmental offices, logistic centers, major population centers, the Government of Vietnam's Presidential Palace, and, the most important psychological target of them all, the United States' Embassy in Saigon.<sup>15</sup> For the most part, these small groups were quickly dispersed; however, there were some notable exceptions, as well as some instances where the Communists proved successful in scoring symbolic or psychological victories even as they were being militarily confounded.

The individual actions by the Communists during the last two days of January could be categorized as either those which received a great deal of media attention in the West or those which did not. By far the larger of the two

categories is the latter. The list of relatively anonymous battle sites is extensive and includes places where the fighting was over in a matter of hours or one or two days, such as Phan Thiet, Dalat, Vihn Loi, Quang Loi, Sadec, Tra Vihn, Soc Trang. This list also includes sites of heavier fighting, sometimes lasting up to four or five days, but of minimal interest to the Western media due to their inconvenient geographical locations, their ostensible strategic insignificance, or their being seen as being less interesting than some of the higher visibility activities in other locations. Locations which met one or more of these criteria include My Tho, Truc Giang, Chau Phu, Vihn Long, Rach Gia, Tra Vinh, and Can Tho.<sup>16</sup>

In all there were over 140 sites which could be categorized as having attracted little attention in the western media, and even today scant attention is paid to them. What is significant to note is that in each instance the allies were able to turn back the offensives, usually very quickly, inflicting on the Communists thousands of casualties, putting many of their best troops out of action, in the process. Correspondents in 1968, as well as subsequent historians, have chosen to focus their attention on a few of the more spectacular, or at least more accessible, elements of the Tet Offensive, such as, the attacks in Saigon and the siege in Hue.<sup>17</sup>

The attack on Saigon was significant for psychological reasons. When the first sappers struck within the city limits on the morning of 31 January, it marked the first time that the Communists had actually mounted an assault in the previously secure South Vietnamese Capital. All of the various assaults failed to achieve their scheduled purposes, but collectively they struck a stunning blow to the confidence of the allies.

In attacking Saigon proper, the strategy was to infiltrate the city, particularly a number of specific strategic sites (e.g. the radio station), and announce that the time had come for the general uprising against the American puppet regime. As they entered the town, the cadres had a list of specific rules of conduct to which they were to strictly adhere. This list demonstrated both military and public relations savvy. Among the rules were admonitions against interfering too greatly with the locals they encountered. The attackers were to respect the properties and livelihoods of the citizens of each hamlet or city. They were also to lay aside any prejudices they may have and treat civilians with deference, paying for all they consumed and taking no war booty. At the same time, the cadres were reminded in their orders of the importance of vigilance at all times. <sup>18</sup> (The complete document appears in Appendix A.)

In addition to the prohibitions given to the cadres entering Saigon, other instructions described the six methods of fighting in which the troops should engage themselves. These included the strengthening of military activities, particularly though middle and large scale strategic attacks, the advancing of guerrilla, warfare, the confounding of the enemy's operations, the sabotaging of important enemy transportation and communication networks, the increasing of military presence and activity within the larger towns and cities, and the coordination of military activity with the concept of military revolt with an emphasis placed on bringing more people over the side of the revolution.<sup>19</sup> (The document appears in its entirety in Appendix B.)

Using these methods of attack, the Communists picked several targets within Saigon for psychological and strategic reasons. These targets included the Joint General Staff compound, the Presidential Palace, three U.S. Military

billets, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, the Philippine embassy, the city radio station, and, the target which drew the most international attention of all, the United States Embassy.<sup>20</sup> As with so many of the other incursions by the Communists, these were all quickly turned away. However, for a greater understanding of the offensive as a whole, the attacks on the radio station, the Presidential Palace, and the United States Embassy will be examined in greater detail.

Part of the North Vietnamese strategy in entering a town was to overrun the local radio station so they could broadcast propaganda, including a call to the listeners that the time for the "General Uprising" had come. Typically, the tenor of the pre-recorded broadcasts resembled the 4 February 1968 broadcast from Hanoi to the whole nation in which the NFLSV Central Committee lauded the soldiers who had won great victories and appealed to the armies and people to "rush forward with the impetus of the new victories, [to] continue to press their attacks more powerfully, widely, and deeply, [and to] mount a general offensive to wipe out the U.S. aggressors and the Thieu-Ky clique...."<sup>21</sup>

According to the plan, a convoy of jeeps and unmarked vehicles carrying Viet Cong arrived at the radio station shortly before 3 a.m. on 31 January. One of the men alighted from a jeep and quickly dispatched the radio station guard. Viet Cong snipers routed other South Vietnamese troops sleeping at the station. Once inside the station, a Viet Cong radio technician, carrying studio diagrams previously provided him by members of the radio station staff, attempted to have tapes calling for the general uprising broadcast.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately for the Communists, however, only one day earlier station director-general Lt. Col. Vu Duc Vinh had arranged a plan by which the studio's feed to the transmitter could be severed in case of emergency. Immediately

following the attack, technicians at the transmitter received the signal to take the studio programming off the air and replace it with what they had available at the transmitter. The plan worked beautifully, and for the next several hours, the transmitter staff treated the people of Saigon to a potpourri of "Viennese waltzes, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Vietnamese martial music."<sup>23</sup> It would be years before the Communists would be successful in controlling the airwaves of Saigon.

The significance of the attack on the Presidential Palace was twofold. First, it demonstrated the audacity of the offensive as a whole; and, second, it made for good television coverage as 14 sappers, 13 men and one woman, most under the age of 20, assaulted what was perhaps the most heavily fortified building in all of Saigon. After arriving at the palace, the insurgents fired a few rounds before retreating to an abandoned apartment building nearby. The ensuing standoff lasted over fifteen hours during which time all three major American networks were able to file ample daylight footage of the gun battle. The sappers never stood a chance, and by the end of the day all of them were killed, but they did get American television coverage.<sup>24</sup>

The third important site of attack in Saigon was the United States Embassy. The significance of this attack was that the embassy provided the Communists with a symbolic victory even in the face of what turned out to be a massacre.<sup>25</sup>

The assault began at 2:47 in the morning as a 19-man Viet Cong sapper group blew a hole in a wall surrounding the embassy. Entering the compound, the sappers killed two American military policemen. From there, the assault on the embassy became a comedy of errors in the dark, featuring a confused

American rescue effort and an inchoate band of Viet Cong guerrillas. Although the sappers were successful in blasting into the embassy compound and firing upon the chancery itself, by the time they entered the garden, their leaders had been killed. Lacking direction, the attackers took positions behind the large, circular planters in the garden and waited for further instructions. Meanwhile, the undermanned American defense force frantically waited for both reinforcements and sun to rise. With an augmented force and the advantage of daylight, the Americans quickly routed the Viet Cong intruders. To General Westmoreland the damage and carnage within the embassy compound was, quite correctly, assessed as "a piddling platoon action." To American journalists, the attack on the embassy was headline news, and an assault which struck at the heart of the American effort in Vietnam.<sup>26</sup>

Of all of the places involved in the Tet offensive, the only protracted battle took place in the ancient capital of Hue, which, like the Embassy in Saigon was a symbolic rather than a military target. At the time of Phase II, the American presence was mostly civilian and there were no U.S. garrisons or significant military installations in Hue. The city was defended by a division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, with various other ARVN battalions located nearby.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike so many other instances, in Hue the Communists were able to take control almost immediately after beginning their siege at just after midnight on 31 January. By morning, the United States had sent Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines from Phu Bai to attempt to drive the Communists out of the city. By 2 February they were joined by several other battalions, but a counterattack was held off in deference to the historical importance of the city, in particular the Citadel, where the Communists were headquartered.<sup>28</sup>

Eventually, a counterattack did take place. Within the city limits, the marines fought from door-to-door and from street-to-street. Weather throughout the siege was miserable. On 6 February, the marines reached the headquarters, but fighting continued until the 24th when the South Vietnamese (by prior agreement the marines disengaged when the Imperial Palace was reached on the 22nd) raised their flag over the Citadel. Mopping up activities continued until March 2, at which time the battle was declared over.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of its major difference in length, the siege at Hue ended in defeat for the North Vietnamese, as had all other engagements of Phase II of the Winter-Spring Offensive. It could be said that for the north, the Tet Offensive failed in every aspect. In addition to being turned back at every engagement, the offensive proved to be a blood bath for both the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong. Estimates of casualties between 29 January and 31 March 1968 claim that 58,373 officers and other personnel from the Army of North Vietnam and Viet Cong forces were killed as compared to 9,063 members of the United States, South Vietnamese, and other allied Armed Forces combined.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the South Vietnamese Army did not fold following the offensive as the Communists thought they would. And, most importantly for the Communist's strategy, the "General Uprising" which was to follow as Phase III of the Winter-Spring Offensive never materialized.

Yet, despite all this, somehow a perception prevails that the Tet Offensive was the turning point--the time at which momentum swung to the favor of the Communists. In order to determine the origins of such a perception, this study examines how the activities during this time period were conveyed to the public by a specific branch of the American media, the San Jose Mercury.



## NOTES

## CHAPTER 3

## THE OFFENSIVE BEGINS

<sup>1</sup>Lee Lescaze, "Saigon Takes on Holiday Air as Tet Arrives," Washington Post, 29 January 1968, A12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Oberdorfer, 71, 203. Ironically, the United States Mission in Vietnam was located on Nguyen Hue Street in Saigon. It was also on this street that South Vietnamese Police Chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan executed a Viet Cong suspect in front of American television cameras. An Associated Press photograph of the execution which appeared in newspapers around the world the following day provided readers with what would become one of the most enduring images of the war. In yet another irony, in his living quarters in Saigon, General Westmoreland displayed a statuette of Nguyen Hue.

<sup>4</sup>"VC Truce Begins War Goes On," Washington Post, 27 January 1968, A1; Edwin Q. White; and "U.S. Moves up Troops; Truce has Some Effects," Washington Star, 28 January 1968, A3.

<sup>5</sup>White; "US Cancels Truce in Northern Sector," Washington Star, 29 January 1968, A1.

<sup>6</sup>Adm. U. S. G. Sharp and Gen. W. C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam, Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1968, 158.

<sup>7</sup>Oberdorfer, 122-124. Sources differ as to the exact times the various elements of the offensive began.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.; Pike, "Data on Tet Offensive - February and March 1968," Unpublished notes, March 5, 1968, Indochina Archives, File W, Date 3/68.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid."

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.; "Press Briefing 1968 Tet Offensive in II CTZ 17 April 1968," 5, Indochina Archives, File W, Subject History, Subject-category Tet 68.

<sup>12</sup>Sharp and Westmoreland, 158. By adding the number of different targets referenced by Westmoreland one arrives at 155. In his assessment of the Tet Offensive, Douglas Pike reckoned 153.

<sup>13</sup>Hammond, 343.

<sup>14</sup>Pike, "The Tet Offensive and the Escalation of the Vietnam War," CRS-23.

<sup>15</sup>Pike, "Data on Tet."

<sup>16</sup>The events in Saigon had the particular advantage of being geographically convenient to report. In many instances correspondents merely had to walk from their hotel rooms to the scene of a clash and then walk back to file their stories. The siege at Hue became the focus of the 1986 Academy Award winning movie Platoon. In addition to the events in Saigon and Hue, the ongoing battle at Khe Sanh, which had particular interest to President Johnson, continued to receive a great deal of press coverage.

<sup>17</sup>Captured Enemy Document, "VC/NVA Offensive Techniques in Cities and Towns," CDEC Doc Log No. 08-0502-68, 33 (of the original text), Indochina Archives, File A, Sub GVN, Date 1968.

<sup>18</sup>Captured Enemy Document, "Concept of the General Offensive," CDEC Doc Log No. 06-1427-68, 13 (of the original text), Indochina Archives, File A, Sub GVN, Date 1968.

<sup>19</sup>Hammond, 344.

<sup>20</sup>"NFLSV Issues Appeal for General Offensive," Hanoi VNA International Service in English, 1657 GMT, 4 February 1968, Indochina Archives, File W, Subject Hist, Date 2/68, Subject-category Tet 68.

<sup>21</sup>Oberdorfer, 144-145. Several other sources also chronicle the various attacks within the city of Saigon during this time period; however, Oberdorfer's is the most thorough.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>24</sup>Braestrup, 75ff.

<sup>25</sup>Oberdorfer, 3-4, 24 passim.

<sup>26</sup>Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1968," 299-300, Indochina Archives, File W, Subject Hist, Date 1968, Subject-category Gen 12-68.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Oberdorfer, Dedication page.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE MERCURY REPORTS ON THE WAR

San Jose in 1968 was a city undergoing major changes. The 1960's would see the population of the city increase from 204,196 to 445,779, an increase of 118.3 per cent. By the end of the decade, the city would have moved from being the nation's 57st most populous city to the 31st, while becoming the fourth largest city in California, behind only Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego.<sup>1</sup>

Serving San Jose at this time were two commercial and one educational television station, eight radio stations, and two major jointly published newspapers, the morning San Jose Mercury and the evening San Jose News.<sup>2</sup> On Sundays, these two newspapers combined as the San Jose Mercury-News. In addition to these media, San Jose residents also had ready access to media emanating from San Francisco and Oakland, each approximately fifty miles to the north.

With a combined Sunday circulation of 192,230, the Mercury-News ranked as the fourth largest newspaper in northern California at the beginning of 1968, trailing the San Francisco Chronicle-Examiner's 680,486, the Oakland Tribune's 257,787, and the Sacramento Bee's 204,354. However, its importance as a print medium during the time of the Tet offensive was greatly enhanced by a southern California newspaper strike.<sup>3</sup>

The newspaper strike began against the Hearst-published Los Angeles Herald-Examiner. On 5 January, 1968, the strike spread to the Hearst-owned

San Francisco Examiner. When workers for the Charles deYoung-published San Francisco Chronicle, which shared office space with the Examiner, honored the strike, production of both newspapers ground to a virtual halt.<sup>4</sup> Beginning with its Saturday January 6 issue and continuing through its 27 February, 1968 issue, the daily Chronicle consisted of a four to ten page newsletter of eight by twelve inch pages on which articles were typed, in lieu of typeset, under roughly pasted headlines. As a result, for the critical juncture of the Vietnam war during which the Tet offensive occurred, northern California's largest newspaper, and the only one with a staff reporter working in Saigon at the time, was rendered all but useless. Readers anxious, for example, to learn more about the unfolding events following the dramatic stand-off at the United States embassy compound in Saigon found the front page of the 31 January, 1968 Chronicle dominated by a story about merchants' fears of piracy on the high seas and this report from Saigon (in its entirety):

"Vietnam Report" Saigon - The Viet Cong shelled Saigon early Wednesday and U.S. marine guards at the U.S. Embassy exchanged fire with a squad of guerrilla commandos trying to enter the embassy.

At least three guerrillas were reported to have entered the grounds of the new embassy, opened late last year.

The shelling of Saigon capped a 24-hour period in which communist forces had made attacks on eight other cities in the country, including Da Nang. Rocket or mortar shells landed near Independence Palace, seat of government, and other government buildings as well as the embassy.<sup>5</sup>

The morning Mercury and afternoon News, unaffected by the strike, were able to provide Bay Area residents more extensive coverage of the happenings in Vietnam on a daily basis than their strike-torn rivals to the north. The James Ridder publications made use of the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Los Angeles

Times, and the Washington Star wire services for its stories from Southeast Asia, stories from at least one of which graced the front page nearly every day during the first two months of 1968 (See Appendices D and E). That the war commanded as much front page attention as it did was not surprising. The nature of the coverage was.

## THE COVERAGE

Coverage of the war in Vietnam was a staple for the Mercury front page. On 57 of the first 60 days of 1968, the Mercury carried at least one story or photograph relating to the war. In addition to stories directly dealing with the fighting or other military aspects of the war, a number of other related articles also appeared on the front page during the first two months of the year. These articles were closely linked to public perceptions of the conflict.

Although the war was reported almost daily, it often took secondary or tertiary importance on the front page. Typical of this treatment was the 1 January issue which featured the banner "New Year Greetings" under which was the newspaper's masthead and the gruesome featured headline "'67 Etched in Auto Blood" beckoning readers to read more about the record 182 auto fatalities in the county during the previous year. Coverage of the war was able to capture some prominence on the front page, however, with three articles and a photograph from Vietnam, with the photograph and one of the articles appearing above the fold.

"U.S. Armor Ambushed" read the headline of the lead Vietnam story of 1 January. The story, a composite from the Associated Press, United Press

International, and the New York Times wire services, reported the enemy instigating 32 "incidents" in violation of the New Year's truce. American troops defended themselves, but 14 were wounded. The enemy suffered much larger casualties.<sup>6</sup> Such stories were commonplace during this period of the war, including the body count scoreboard which invariably indicated that the Allies were winning; however, on the front page also appeared coverage which demonstrated that there were very different ways of viewing the events in Southeast Asia.

Sharing page one with "U.S. Armor Ambushed" were a photograph and two other related articles. The photograph, captioned "Outlook Grim," showed an unidentified marine on sentry guard near Phu Long Village. The guard appeared tense as he stood close to a wall out of the way of potential sniper fire. One of the articles, "S.J. Deserter on TV," described Craig Anderson, a San Jose native who along with three other navy seamen jumped ship to defect to the Soviet Union in 1967, being interviewed on CBS television. Meanwhile, Pope Paul VI's call for world peace, particularly in Vietnam, was the focus of "Pope Sees Some Hope for Peace."<sup>7</sup>

Much of the same difference of opinion could be found on the Public Forum page for 1 January, 1968. While the editorial page gave the Vietnam War only passing mention as one of the concerns facing congress, three letters to the editor presented three very different points of view concerning the war. In his letter, M. J. Vercoe proposed the abolition of conventional warfare in favor of nuclear wars in order to provide a deterrent to all wars. Five members from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, meanwhile, commended the Dow Company for their manufacturing Napalm to which the writers attributed the saving of many

American lives in Vietnam. Yet another approach was sought by letter writer Douglas Mattern who assailed the injustice of the conflict and urged immediate withdrawal of American troops. (It should be noted that the three letters concerning the war appearing on the same day was quite an anomaly. Letters to the editor were published only sporadically during the first 60 days of 1968, and letters dealing with Vietnam were not particularly prominent.)<sup>8</sup>

New Year's Day 1968 also left the Mercury with one fewer pro-war advocates on the editorial page as Barry Goldwater discontinued writing his syndicated column in order to once again become more active in Arizona politics.<sup>9</sup>

Front page coverage of the issues directly related to the war during the first 30 days of January could be divided into four basic types of article:

1. Those heralding Allied successes and assaults;
2. Those describing enemy successes or Allied setbacks;
3. Those which relayed warnings, defined positions, or described administration maneuvers, including negotiations with bordering countries;
4. Those which dealt with peace initiatives proffered by the warring factions.

Stories of the first type were virtually non-existent on the front page during the first two weeks of the new year. It was not until 17 January that a piece dedicated to allied success appeared on page one. The report asserted that the Communists were forced into returning to guerrilla tactics as a result of the high casualties they experienced in conventional warfare.<sup>10</sup>

A spate of positive stories followed the one describing the change in Communist plans. American successes, illustrated with impressive body count



statistics, were among the lead stories of the day on 18, 19, and 21 January.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, during the first month of 1968 the number of stories focusing on progress made by the allied forces represented a small fraction of the total number of stories pertaining to the war.

The second type of article, those having to do with progress made by the enemy, were better represented on the front page in the weeks preceding the arrival of Tet than those in those of the first type. The first 28 days of the new year saw no fewer than 10 front page articles reporting some form of attack or advance initiated by the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong. Headlines such as "'Bloodiest Truce' Cong Attack Kills 26 GI's" on 2 January, "In Coordination Reds Launch 7 Big Attacks" on 8 January, and "POURING IN FROM LAOS Red Forces Hurl Attack Along 'McNamara Wall'" on 22 January were common during the first four weeks of the year. Invariably the articles which accompanied these headlines described successful enemy ambushes, huge raids which defied allied intelligence, or the enemy's use of some type of weapon which had not previously been part of their attack.<sup>12</sup>

Resolving the issue of Cambodia's being used by the Communists as sanctuary was the main issue discussed among the articles included in the third category. To find a resolution to the problem, President Johnson sent Ambassador Chester W. Bowles from his post in India to Phnom Penh to discuss the situation with Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Within a week a pact was signed in which the Prince agreed not to allow enemy soldiers to use Cambodia as a haven, and the Americans agreed not to cross Cambodia's border in "hot pursuit" of the enemy. Within two weeks the Americans would be forced to

apologize for encroaching 75 yards into Cambodia during a battle (See below).<sup>13</sup>

In the fourth category were articles dealing with finding a means of concluding the war. By 1968 overtures had been made by both North Vietnam and the United States indicating that peace negotiations would be possible. Meanwhile, the Pope and various other world and religious leaders' increasing pleas for a cessation of hostilities graced front pages across the nation.<sup>14</sup> While the Johnson administration continued to proffer the San Antonio Formula, a strategy by which the president offered to cease saturation bombing in North Vietnam as a means to initiate negotiations, North Vietnamese government leaders responded with conflicting messages concerning their eagerness to proceed.<sup>15</sup>

Although pressure to proceed with peace talks was being applied from various of the world, not all world leaders were in accord that such negotiations should take place. Leaders of the Communist Chinese government in Peking (Beijing) were among those who urged their counterparts in Hanoi to reject any peace proposal and to continue with the war.<sup>16</sup> The Chinese leaders had taken a position somewhat different from that which the Johnson administration and the North Vietnamese government seemed to share: that given a set of specific circumstances each side would be amenable to commence with a peace conference.

In addition to the articles in which both war and peace angles were directly addressed, a number of other major stories unrelated to the waging or perceptions of the war also gained prominence during the first month of 1968. These stories served to diminish the visibility of the war reporting both in terms

of reducing daily column inches and also in their forcing Vietnam news below the fold. One such story was the first heart transplant at nearby Stanford University (only the fourth such operation in the world). The ongoing saga of heart recipient Mike Kaspernak became a staple above the fold on the front page following the 6 January operation until the patient's death on 21 January. However, front pages during this time also featured a number of other items which would have significant, albeit indirect, implications for the war effort.

One of the issues of great importance to the president was that of a growing schism within his party fueled by opposition to the war. During the first few weeks of the presidential election year President Johnson was already beginning to feel some pressure from within his party. Senator Eugene McCarthy, while far behind the president in the polls, received a "rousing welcome" at Stanford University as he campaigned as the "peace candidate" in California. Also of great concern to the president was the growing speculation regarding a possible challenge for the White House by Senator Robert Kennedy.<sup>17</sup> Additional challenges to the Johnson's campaign were realized on 22 January with the announcement that both George Wallace's American Independent Party and the anti-war Peace and Freedom Party had secured enough signatures to qualify for the California ballot.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, all things were not well within the administration. Secretary of Defense McNamara, who had served in the cabinet since the Kennedy administration, announced his resignation to become president of the World Bank.<sup>19</sup> Over 20 years later, McNamara's successor, Clark Clifford, would attribute the resignation to McNamara's increasing despondency about the war and his pessimistic assessment for its continuance.<sup>20</sup>

Anti-war protesters were also making front page news. On 5 January Dr. Benjamin Spock, the highly respected physician known as "the baby doctor" for his best-selling books on child care, and Yale's chaplain Rev. William Sloane Coffin were among five noted peace activists indicted by a federal grand jury for inciting students to evade the draft. Photographs of both Reverend Coffin and Doctor Spock appeared under the masthead of the 6 January issue.<sup>21</sup> The involvement of such well-respected figures, especially Doctor Spock, added to the legitimacy of the anti-war movement, particularly among the middle class.

A more vociferous anti-war demonstration was the subject of a front page story on 12 January. The demonstration was prompted by Secretary of State Dean Rusk's visit to address the Commonwealth Club at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. Accompanying the story of Rusk's visit and the demonstration it elicited was a photograph showing San Francisco police officers clashing with the protesters.<sup>22</sup> To the reader in San Jose, the greater impression was not of the speech given by the secretary of state in nearby San Francisco, but of the protest and violence which accompanied it.

Anti-war dissent deemed worthy of front page coverage was not confined to California. The 19 and 20 January issues of the Mercury each carried front page stories of an anti-war outburst which took place within the actual confines of the White House. The incident occurred when popular singer and actress Eartha Kitt used a White House luncheon as a forum to lambaste the war and high taxes. Kitt, who was one of about 50 guests at the luncheon hosted by First Lady Lady Bird Johnson to discuss the problems of juvenile delinquency and crime, left her hostess in tears with an emotional tirade in which she asserted

that the war and high taxes were causing America's youth to rebel. Although other guests would speak in support of the president and the war, it was Kitt's outburst which propelled the luncheon, which would otherwise have been of little significance, onto the front page for two days.<sup>23</sup>

In light of developments such as those noted above, those responsible for continuation of the war effort could ill afford any embarrassments of their own. Nevertheless, that was exactly what they got as over a period of only two days the United States Air Force and Navy found themselves confronting international crises of monumental proportions. These crises occurred even as the South Vietnamese militia and the United States Marines were forced by Communist forces to evacuate the town of Khe Sanh and as the United States State Department was offering a formal apology to Cambodia for an inadvertent incursion into that country in the course of a skirmish with the Viet Cong.<sup>24</sup>

It would be hard to imagine the tens of thousands of San Jose Mercury subscribers finding much solace in the banner which informed them on the morning of 23 January, 1968 "4 H-BOMBS MISSING AFTER B52 CRASHES." That the crash occurred in a remote part of Greenland (about as far from Vietnam as one could get!) and that all of the devices were "unarmed so that there (was) no danger of a nuclear explosion at the crash site" diffused to some extent the potential for what could have been truly a catastrophic situation. Nonetheless, the incident left the Air Force both embarrassed and open to domestic and international condemnation.<sup>25</sup>

As bad as the news was on 23 January, it got even worse the following day as less than a week before the outbreak of the Tet Offensive the biggest story of the month of January 1968 broke--a story which would dominate the

front page for a week and reduce the usually generous coverage from Vietnam to a scant two-and-one-fourth inches in the five-star edition on 27 January and no mention at all on the front page of the 28 January edition: the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo by North Korea.

The immediate response from Washington D.C. to the unfolding drama was to send a task force toward North Korea and to deploy fighter jets to bases in South Korea. Public response to the immediate actions was overwhelmingly positive.<sup>26</sup> As information relating to the Pueblo's mission of spying in North Korean waters came to light, however, the patriotic fervor of the moment began to wane, and the credibility of the administration and the intelligence establishment was called into question. While the impact of the Pueblo incident with regard to the war in Vietnam has been the subject of much speculation, the timing of the Pueblo debacle was particularly unfortunate for the Johnson administration, as it not only served to downplay the importance of a California Poll which showed the president's Vietnam policy approval rating rebounding from its low point in September 1967, but it also provided a dramatic lead-in for the next major news story: the Tet Offensive.<sup>27</sup>

### THE OFFENSIVE BEGINS

Considering the maelstrom which was to follow, the actions signifying the commencement of the Tet Offensive commanded relatively scant media attention in the West. Less than 12 inches (including headline) were allotted on the front page of the San Jose Mercury five-star final for Tuesday morning 30 January 1968 to the outbreak of "heavy attacks" by Communist forces which

resulted in the calling off of the New Year cease-fire. The uprising was described in the lone Vietnam-related article which appeared on page one, and was relegated to a position in the far right column under the masthead and a two-and-one-half inch banner proclaiming the day's lead story, "2 Cars Hit--4 Dead."<sup>28</sup>

In spite of its brevity, the 30 January article contained a number of significant bits of information. First was the sketchy initial description of the (premature) launching of a the nationwide assault which was to have been undertaken 24 hours later. Second, an inkling of the strength and coordination the enemy would be able to muster was given as the Communists were able to simultaneously attack important "American enclaves at Da Nang and Nha Trang" along with "at least six provincial capitals" wreaking an estimated \$15 million worth of damage at the Da Nang airbase alone. Third was the ominous assessment from an unnamed United State spokesman that, "This is no longer infiltration, this is an invasion." Finally, it revealed that the allies had completely misinterpreted the intent of the uprising. Chief information officer for the United States Military Assistance Command in Saigon Brig. Gen. Winant Sidle interpreted the Communist attacks, particularly those in the Central Highlands, as an attempt to draw allied forces away from the north so that a major offensive could be launched against the American base at Khe Sanh.<sup>29</sup>

For many scholars the massive Communist Tet uprising with the dramatic Viet Cong assault on the United States Embassy in Saigon marked the most significant event of the war. It becomes remarkable, therefore, in retrospect, that the banner of the Tuesday 31 January 1968 San Jose Mercury five-star final should have read, "Fear 16 Dead In Snow," but such was the case as a major

storm ravaged Northern California, dropping record amounts of rain and snow on the state. Blizzard conditions marooned at least 16 people throughout the state.<sup>30</sup>

As with the front page coverage of the commencement of the offensive the day before, the report describing the more active second day of the uprising, with its aforementioned guerrilla raid on the embassy, was relegated to the single column to the far right-hand side of the page. The story was given more prominence, however, by a photograph occupying four columns just under the masthead which depicted two armed United States soldiers lying prone behind a tree across the street from the embassy. (Earlier editions used a long shot of a helicopter landing on the embassy roof in the same space.)

The article itself gave accounts of how the multi-million dollar embassy was built after the previous one had been destroyed by a car bomb, how a small Viet Cong suicide squad was able to blast its way into the compound, how the few Americans,--including one diplomat, United States mission coordinator Col. George Jacobson--were able to stave off the attack until reinforcements were able to rout the attackers, how reports varied as to whether any of the guerrillas were actually able to enter the building, and how United States Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker had to alter his travel plans because of the siege. One paragraph on the page two jump of the article mentioned that:

The attack into Saigon climaxed a major Communist offensive throughout much of the country, in which the Communists stormed into eight major cities and 30 to 40 smaller ones. The attacks caused tens of millions of dollars worth of damage, particularly among American aircraft parked at Da Nang and other airfields.<sup>31</sup>

The American losses described in this paragraph were tempered in the next with the report that, "Casualties for the Communists were...high."<sup>32</sup> In



determining the rationale behind the nationwide offensive, the speculation was given that the enemy had two key objectives: 1) To effect a "propaganda show," and; 2) To divert "Allied troops from the northern provinces where a major battle seemed imminent."<sup>33</sup>

Front page coverage of the war would increase dramatically the following day as the five-star final edition featured an eight column in one-and-one-half inch type with the disturbing message, "Cong Roving Saigon." In contrast to the report of the routing of the embassy guerrillas in the previous day's news, the New York Times and UPI contribution accompanying the headline told of an infiltration of Viet Cong concentrated in the predominantly Chinese suburb of Saigon known as Cholon, and extending to within a few hundred yards of Ambassador Bunker's now unoccupied home, and virtually all other areas in and around Saigon. The infiltrators, the piece added, were not altogether unwelcomed, as residents in another Saigon suburb were seen preparing meals for them.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the disconcerting news of the enemy's seemingly uncontested entry into South Vietnam's capital, the report, which was sub-headed "Red Assault Losses 5,000," briefly mentioned that "At least 21 of South Vietnam's 44 province capitals had come under attack since Monday night plus the two largest cities -- Da Nang and Saigon -- and numerous other areas." Accompanying the article was a map of South Vietnam which purported to show the cities hit during the offensive. This map reflected the narrow breadth of the reporting of the war as the only target cities shown were the North Vietnamese city of Dong Hoi near the border of South Vietnam, and the South Vietnamese cities of Saigon, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Kontum, Da Nang, Quang

Tri, and the besieged city which would soon become the main focus for western reporters, Hue.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile in Washington D.C., President Johnson was responding to the unfolding crises in Asia by having breakfast with senior members of the Senate and House Armed Services and Appropriations committees. From the meeting rose speculation that the president was seeking to call up an unspecified number of reservists with specialized skills to be sent to Asia as needed.<sup>36</sup>

Notwithstanding President Johnson's early morning meeting, reporting on Vietnam was very different in February from what it had been in January, as the emphasis of the news coverage became the fighting rather than the administration of the war. The amount of coverage increased dramatically, too, as the number of front page column inches dedicated to the war went from an average of 25.9 to 38.3 inches per day, an increase of 48%. Where there had been three days with no mention of the war on page one during the month of January, there were none in February. While the greatest total of war-related column inches in January was 59.75, the war commanded over 60 column inches on five different occasions during the month of February, with the largest total being 78.75. Furthermore, the San Jose Mercury featured nine war-related banners (one under the masthead, eight above) among its 29 February five-star final editions as compared with only two for its 31 January five-star final editions.

The degree to which the nature of the coverage changed could easily be measured in terms of lineage for various war related topics. Peace issues, for example, all but disappeared from the front page. Of the peace-related articles

which were featured on page one, those in the 5 February and 13 February issues gave little encouragement to those hoping for a negotiated settlement to the hostilities as in the former Secretary of State Rusk indicated that the recent uprising demonstrated that Hanoi was unprepared to proceed with peace talks and in the latter President Johnson, while reaffirming his support for the San Antonio plan, said that he had little patience left in waiting for an answer.<sup>37</sup> The only other peace-related article receiving attention during the month dealt with United Nations Secretary General U Thant's brief meeting with French and North Vietnamese officials during a Paris stopover. (See below.)<sup>38</sup>

In sharp contrast to the diminished importance of peace issues was the sudden dominance on page one of descriptions of battles and other war-related violence. Whereas the Mercury featured few such stories in January, they became ubiquitous during the first two weeks of February, appearing under tersely worded headlines which drew readers' attentions to their descriptions of hard fought skirmishes, territories won or lost, extremely high body counts, and the hell of war. A sampling of the headlines during this period gives a flavor of the nature of the reporting:

- "10,953 Cong Killed Warplanes Divebomb Ancient Hue" (2 February)
- "Enemy Still Holds Many Cities Fresh Fighting Flares in Saigon and Suburbs" (3 February)
- "Missionaries Massacred" (3 February)
- "Door-To-Door Battles In Viet 14,997 Enemy Killed" (4 February)
- "Saigon Reds Bombed" (6 February)
- "Green Berets Target of Red Tank Attack" (7 February)
- "Green Beret Camp Falls Reds Slam Khe Sanh" (8 February)

- "Lang Vei Overrun By Tanks 392 Defenders Dead" (8 February)
- "Rusk Warns of Climax Viet Cong Invade Town Behind 'Human Shields'" (11 February)
- "300 In Atrocity Civilians Executed By Cong" (12 February)

The articles which accompanied these headlines painted a picture of a brutal nationwide struggle in which the Allies, while inflicting heavy casualties, were finding themselves either entrenched in a stalemate (as in Khe Sanh), grinding out a slow, arduous advance (as in Hue), or confronting enemy infiltration and chicanery. Examples of the third type of situation were described in "Fatal Treachery U. S. Employees Helped Cong Invade Embassy" on 5 February and "Rusk Warns of Climax Viet Cong Invade Town Behind 'Human Shields'" on 11 February. The former of the two articles alleged that two Vietnamese drivers employed by the embassy used their identification cards to enter the compound where they shot two American M.P.s clearing the way for the Viet Cong sappers to attack the installation. This information, while officially denied, pointed up the degree to which Viet Cong infiltration and influence had become pervasive even within the "safe" city of Saigon. The 11 February article, the lone front page war-related story of the day, demonstrated the level to which the enemy would stoop, as the Communists advanced behind a column of women and children hostages in their attack of the Mekong delta town of Bac Lieu.<sup>39</sup>

Enemy brutality was exposed even further the following day as the single page one entry from Vietnam gave the first sketchy report of the discovery of the remains of 300 victims of executions by the Communists in Hue.<sup>40</sup> Although

many more victims would eventually be found, many may still remained buried, undiscovered.

With its brief page one article relating to the Vietnam war, 11 February's Mercury reached the low water mark for front page column inches for the month. There appeared on page two, however, two articles having significance to the war. The first was a Gallup poll which showed that 45% of all Americans felt that the nation would become involved in a war with Korea over the Pueblo incident, and that 40% favored the use of force, if necessary, to get the ship returned. These numbers demonstrated that even in the face of the lack of resolution in the war in Vietnam, a significant portion of the population still felt that, given proper provocation, war was still a viable option.<sup>41</sup>

The second article of significance on page two of the 11 February edition was one which cited a North Vietnamese Communist Party newspaper as likening of the siege at Khe Sanh to the decisive 55 day battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Although the analogy would prove to be false, the Johnson administration in 1968 had already drawn the parallel between the two sieges and was prepared to spare no expense in preventing a defeat such as the one the French had suffered 14 years earlier. What made the article significant was that was the first time that the Communists had officially made the connection between the Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh with regard to overall strategy.<sup>42</sup>

The scant front page coverage in the 11 February edition marked the fourth consecutive day with a reduction in column inches, and represented one-tenth the presence the war had commanded just six days earlier. This trend was reversed, however, as during the last two weeks of the month the war in

Vietnam would dominate the front page, capturing over 50 column inches in eight of the last 14 days in February and over 20 in each of the remaining six.

Notwithstanding 19 February's lengthy article with accompanying photograph of President Johnson discussing the war with former President Dwight Eisenhower on a California golf course, the picture painted on the front page during the second half of February was even more grim than that which had been painted during the first.

The struggle to retake Hue was the most prominent of the news stories during this period. Daily, the Mercury reported the excruciatingly slow progress being made by the marines trying to rid the city of Communist forces which had captured the famed Citadel. Allied forces encountered heavy counter-fire and several setbacks as the enemy inflicted unprecedented high casualties during the four week battle. On 23 February, the headline "Marines Capture Hue Wall Spearheaded by Napalm" announced that real progress was at last being made by the Allies in the beleaguered city. A photograph of a Republic of South Vietnam flag being raised over the Citadel in the 26 February edition provided graphic proof that the siege was finally over.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to showing their tenacity and intelligence in Hue, the Communists were also reported to have made great strides at flustering the allies in other parts of South Vietnam. On 18 February, the Sunday Mercury-News, which typically featured very little war coverage, reported that the Communists had launched a second offensive in which more than 20 cities were attacked. The following day, the front page once again brought news of an enemy assault, this one being a rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon.<sup>44</sup>

"New Saigon Attack" proclaimed the banner over the 21 February five-star edition, directing readers to a report of American infantrymen repulsing a Viet Cong drive near Hue. Fighting intensified around the one-time "safe" capital of South Vietnam during the next week, as articles on 22, 24, and 26 February attested. While the attacks were all turned back, the Communists were able to wreak more damage on Ton Son Nhut with their second rocket attack in a week.<sup>45</sup> They were also able to demonstrate how thoroughly they had been able to infiltrate the South.

The increase in enemy activity also brought the worst news of all for the Americans as it was reported on 16 February that 416 Americans had been killed during the previous week of fighting. This was the highest weekly total up to that point in the war. The news got worse the following week as a new record of 543 fatalities were reported. Nearly one out of every twelve fatalities suffered by the Americans during the three and one half years of war had occurred in the three-and-one-half weeks since the Tet Offensive.<sup>46</sup>

For the Santa Clara county reader, good news from Vietnam was hard to find during the last two weeks of February. Other than the liberation of Hue, positive news for the allies was limited to a 27 February article describing three North Vietnamese tanks being destroyed near the Cambodian border by Green Berets and another on 28 February in which American bombers flew a series of successful sorties into Laos.<sup>47</sup> The latter article appeared one day after one in which North Vietnamese troops succeeded in capturing eight Laotian villages.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, back in the United States, the news concerning the war effort during the second half of February 1968 gave every indication that things were

not going well. Most notable were reports of the declining popularity of the president and his handling of the war; a congressional inquiry into the Gulf of Tonkin event; the reassessment of the number of personnel the administration felt were required in Vietnam; and, the faltering peace talks involving United Nations Secretary General U Thant.

A Gallup poll published on 14 February showed that an increasing percentage of the American population disapproved of President Johnson's handling of the war. The poll indicated that the percentage of people who approved of the president's had dwindled to 35, while the 61 per cent of those polled favoring increased military efforts signified an increase of nine per cent in a month and a half.<sup>49</sup> (This short-lived increase in pro-escalation sentiment was a rarity in a war which saw a steady decline in popularity between 1965 and 1971. See Appendix C.) Four days later the president received more bad news from George Gallup as the pollster cited the "recent Viet Cong uprising" as the cause for the decline in the public's approval of the president's handling of his job. Gallup's numbers showed that in a reverse from January's results, more people now disapproved of Johnson's handling of his office than approved.<sup>50</sup>

Another salvo against President Johnson was launched in the Senate during the last week of February as an investigation into the Gulf of Tonkin incident chaired by Senator J. William Fullbright hit the front page for several days in a row. In his investigation the Arkansas Democrat debunked the official version of what transpired to precipitate American escalation in Southeast Asia, and produced evidence damaging to the credibility of both the president and former Secretary of Defense McNamara.<sup>51</sup>



Diplomatically, the president was receiving yet more bad news. Johnson's San Antonio proposal was still being ignored by the Communists, resulting in the president's running short on patience.<sup>52</sup> United Nations Secretary General U Thant stepped into the breach in mid-February, meeting with North Vietnamese diplomats in Paris and later with President Johnson in Washington, but his efforts also failed to bring any progress to ending the conflict.<sup>53</sup>

All of these factors led the administration to face the credibility damaging prospect of once again having to reassess the degree of American involvement in Vietnam, in particular with regard to number of troops to be deployed. By 23 February 1968, General Westmoreland requested the ceiling authorized by President Johnson for number of troops be raised to 525,000, a figure which would be the highest of the war to date and 40,000 over what the ceiling had been just two months earlier.<sup>54</sup>

Johnson acquiesced. During the next two weeks the United States Department of Defense announced that 48,000 men would be drafted in April, making it the second largest call-up during the war. One day earlier the Joint Chiefs of Staff made public a plan which would put 130,000 men on alert for duty in Vietnam, while calling up 50,000 new army national guardsmen and marine corps reservists to fill in around the world in areas of troop attrition due to the Vietnam War.<sup>55</sup> Still, it would not be enough. On the last day of the month, the Mercury printed a Washington Post article which described yet another reassessment--one based on General Westmoreland's request for 100,000 to 200,000 more troops. This latest request was enough to make even administration insiders wonder when it would ever end.<sup>56</sup>

## THE OP-ED PAGE

During this dramatic juncture of the war the editorial page was surprisingly silent about the recent activities and the impacts they might have. Editorials by the staff regarding the war appeared only about once a week. Letters to the Editor, not a daily feature of the editorial page in 1968, offered very few additional opinions to the mix, and cartoons on the Op-Ed page were as likely to encourage reading the Bible as they were to make a point regarding the war.

As has been mentioned, the editorial page lost a vociferous advocate of the war with the resignation of Barry Goldwater at the beginning of the year. Left to opine on the situation in Vietnam were syndicated columnists James Reston, Joseph Alsop, and Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson whose "Washington Merry-Go-Round" provided the most op-ed lineage regarding the war.

For their part, the editors of the Mercury dismissed the attack on the United States Embassy as a terrorist failure which would be propagandized as a success by Hanoi. The editorial, which appeared without by-line in the 2 February edition, surmised the Tet Offensive followed a script in which the offensive itself was a last ditch effort by the Communists to strengthen their position prior to negotiating what would be a coalition government in Saigon.<sup>57</sup> This position was reaffirmed in another unattributed editorial on 6 February in which the editors declared the Tet Offensive a failure, as it was obvious that the Tet attacks did not result in the general uprising desired. There seemed little

question that peace talks would commence within the next few weeks.<sup>58</sup> Further editorials touted the heavy casualties reported by a North Vietnamese P.O.W. and pointed out the striking differences between Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu.<sup>59</sup>

By the end of the month, after another editorial speculating on North Vietnam's readiness to negotiate for peace, the board altered its stance and argued for a more aggressive role in effecting peace negotiations. In the 27 February editorial, the position taken was that it had become obvious to all, save United Nations Secretary General Thant, that North Vietnam had no interest in negotiating until all military attempts had failed. Recent events in the war were indicative of the enemy's go-for-broke approach.<sup>60</sup> For the editorial board, the Tet Offensive was the last gasp effort of a failing enemy, which having failed, would have them accede to peace terms. Ultimately, the board allowed that additional military support from the United States might be required to accelerate the process, but the process had indeed begun.

If the reading public was deeply moved by the drama at the embassy, the standoff at Khe Sanh, or the tension at Hue, it would not have been obvious to the reader of the "Public Forum" section of the Mercury. A total of three letters to the editor addressing the Vietnam War were published during the entire month of February 1968. Of the three, none dealt with the Tet offensive. One expressed an opposition to the war in general, lamenting the loss of the lives of "free Americans," another disagreed with Sen. Kennedy's Vietnam stance, and the third applauded Sen. Fullbright's Gulf of Tonkin probe.<sup>61</sup>

Syndicated columnists picked up the slack in assessing America's role in Vietnam, yet even they were wont to focus on issues other than the ongoing

offensive. Drew Pearson's column, "Washington Merry-Go-Round" on 3 February reiterated the message of his 28 January column which discussed disgruntled South Vietnamese men who resented the loss of their girlfriends to American G.I.s and retaliated by bombing United States outposts in Saigon. The message from South Vietnam, according to Pearson is "Yankee Go Home." Pearson followed this with a pair of columns lambasting Gen. Westmoreland and calling for his resignation. In the second, on 10 February, the Tet Offensive is alluded to as "the recent shellacking." This is the nearest any contributor to the Op-Ed page came to implying that the Communist assault was anything but a failure for the enemy. Pearson's final contribution to the "Washington Merry-Go-Round" regarding the war was a history of the past 18 years of American involvement, with special attention given to the role of then-Sen. Lyndon Johnson. Subsequent "Washington Merry-Go-Rounds" bore the by-line of Jack Anderson.<sup>62</sup>

Like Pearson, Anderson stayed on the periphery of the issue. In the four war-related columns he contributed between 24 and 29 February, only the fourth addressed recent Communist activity. The other three dealt with Communism throughout Asia, graft within the South Vietnamese government, and the faltering presidency of Nguyen Van Thieu. In his 29 February column Anderson described the siege at Khe Sanh and the airlift missions which were keeping the base alive.<sup>63</sup>

Khe Sanh had also been the subject of one of two contributions from James Reston during the month of February. Reston foresaw in a 2 February opinion piece the possibility of a retreat by General Giap and the North Vietnamese Army should the assault on Khe Sanh prove a failure. Five days

later, Reston pondered the question of whether or not the war could be won without destroying Vietnam.<sup>64</sup>

Of all the columnists appearing regularly on the Op-Ed page in February 1968, none critiqued the war as extensively as Joseph Alsop. On 29 January Alsop was the first to speculate that Khe Sanh might be a "turning point" of the war, albeit one in which he saw the tide turning *against* the North Vietnamese. Following the offensive, Alsop penned a pair of columns in which the enemy's actions during the Tet Offensive were indications that the enemy was "going for broke." The first of the two columns likened General Giap's strategy to the "mistake of Nguyen Bihn," the North Vietnamese leader who sent his entire force against the French in 1950 with disastrous results, while the second cited the enormous casualties inflicted on the Viet Cong as being ultimately unacceptable to the enemy. Alsop continued his assessment of enemy ruin in his next contribution which he referred to as a "post mortem on Tet Offensive." Douglas Pike was cited in this column which concluded that General Giap's strategy had failed absolutely. By the end of the month, Alsop was convinced that the Communists were ready to be had; in a 28 February piece, he advocated the call up of whatever reserves were necessary to draw the war to a prompt conclusion.<sup>65</sup>

The New York Times provided three editorials to the Mercury, none of which dealt with the Tet Offensive. Russell Baker provided a sardonic look at the "O.O.P." (Office of Optimistic Prognosis), Tom Wicker's "In The Nation" column discussed the "tide of human despair" brought about in South Vietnam by United States firepower, and Chick Sulzberger examined American strategy in Vietnam and found it needing adjustment.<sup>66</sup>

Roscoe Drummond pitched in his opinion of strategy in three pieces which appeared during the latter part of the month. The tenor of these pieces was that recent events had "radically altered" the shape of the war. Drummond was less optimistic than some of his counterparts in his assessment of the tough fighting in the coming months. Moreover, Drummond expressed concern for the working relationship between the United States and South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the question and answer section of the 23 February column provided his conclusion that North Vietnam was running out of time, and that the Tet Offensive was a "turning point" in that it demonstrated the Communists' need to win quickly or lose altogether. Unlike Alsop, Drummond saw recent events as turning in the favor of the allies.<sup>67</sup>

William F. Buckley brought a very different perspective to the mix in one of the two war columns he contributed during the month of February. The syndicated columnist opined in his 23 February "On the Right" column that this time was right to unleash the atomic bomb in Vietnam. This war strategy was not a new one, but one which had been harbored by right wing factions for some time prior to Tet. Buckley's resurrection of this idea in the heat of Khe Sanh and Hue may have been eagerly embraced among certain factions in 1968, but "The Bomb" was never to be dropped in Vietnam.<sup>68</sup>

Editorial cartoonists contributed but three war-related cartoons between 28 January and 29 February 1968. The first of these, which was published prior to the Communist uprising, reflected the frustration which had been growing throughout the country for some time and would be discussed by Buckley, Reston, and other columnists in the coming month. In it the ghost of Gen. Douglas MacArthur stood looking at Vietnam. In his hand was a paper on

which was written a quote from MacArthur himself; "War's very object is victory, not prolonged indecision. In war there is no substitute for victory...."<sup>69</sup>

Both of the editorial cartoons published in February reiterated American frustration. The first of the two depicted the frustration of peace negotiations by showing President Johnson imploring a vicious looking, bloody, machete yielding guerrilla; "Let us reason together," while the second, drawn by Shoemaker, pictured Uncle Sam, exhausted as the world's policeman, sitting on top of the world, soaking his feet in a washtub. The caption for this cartoon read; "A tiring beat." By 1968 the image of Uncle Sam as a weary policeman had already become a recurring theme. In fact, the Mercury had already featured the concept by another cartoonist in January.<sup>70</sup>

All in all, the Tet Offensive had very little impact on the content of the Op-Ed page of the Mercury. For those who did chose to write about it, history has shown that, for the most part, their analyses were flawed. Some of the pundits used the events to promote opinions they had previously expounded; others ignored it altogether. The editors of the Mercury certainly did not afford the assault an amount of space which would seem commensurate to what would later be considered among the major events of the biggest news story of the decade. The siege at Khe Sanh commanded more Op-Ed interest than the attack on the American Embassy, the action at Hue, or any other of the assaults which were part of the Tet Offensive; and even Khe Sanh was treated little differently from any of a number of aspects of the war. In fact, overall war strategy and the situation with North Korea and the Pueblo were the subjects of more editorial interest in February 1968 than Khe Sanh and Tet combined! While television news may have focused on the action of the war, the Op-Ed

pages of newspapers, including the San Jose Mercury, on the less dramatic elements of the conflict.

## SUMMARY

As has been shown, following the Tet Offensive, the San Jose Mercury and Mercury-News presented an image from Vietnam of tremendous casualties for both sides, minimal allied progress, an enemy with an ability to infiltrate "safe" areas almost at will, a confused and inconsistent administration which was losing the support of the American public, an impasse in peace negotiations, a stalemate in Khe Sanh, and, in general, no "light at the end of the tunnel." This type of coverage was much more negative than that immediately prior to the offensive. Meanwhile, columnists provided scant new information about the conflict, and much of what was provided would later be proved to be faulty. All of which begs the question: what effect did this type of journalism have?

In spite of the dearth of optimism in the reporting, the Tet Offensive and the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo a week earlier not only briefly reversed the erstwhile declining public support for the war, but also led to popular support for military action against Korea as well. This militaristic trend, while supported on the Op-Ed page, would be quickly reversed as the Pueblo incident disappeared from the front page, and the American people returned to a pattern of gradually diminishing support for the war which would continue unabated over the next five years.



As for the president, the shortest month of the year may also have been the worst. During the month he watched his personal popularity and voter confidence diminish, had his insecurities about the war scrutinized, watched with frustration as American troops were bogged down in Hue and Khe Sanh, bid farewell to long-time Secretary of Defense McNamara, had his peace offers spurned, and continued to confront an international embarrassment caused by the Pueblo debacle in North Korea. To exacerbate matters, all of this took place in an election year. Immediately after the Tet Offensive, eventual winner Republican Richard Nixon found a receptive audience for his announcement of candidacy for the presidency. Meanwhile, inspired by the success of "peace candidate" Sen. Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary, popular Democrat and long-time Johnson nemesis Sen. Robert Kennedy announced that he too would enter the race.<sup>71</sup>

Near the end of the month, the president returned for his first appearance in Dallas since the tragic events in that city on 22 November 1963 had propelled him into the White House. Shortly after passing near the sites where four-and-a-quarter years earlier United States history was inexorably altered, the president announced to 7,000 delegates at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Convention the ironic message that America again stood "...at a turning point...."<sup>72</sup> Little did the president appreciate that the turning point had already passed, both for Johnson himself and for his war.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER 4

THE MERCURY REPORTS ON THE WAR

<sup>1</sup>Dan Golenpaul, Information Please Almanac, Atlas, and Yearbook 1972, (New York: Dan Golenpaul and Assoc., 1971), 587.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Golenpaul, Information Please Almanac, Atlas, and Yearbook 1969, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 641.

<sup>4</sup>"Chronicle Publication Curtailed by Los Angeles Picket Line," San Francisco Chronicle, 6 January 1968, 1.

<sup>5</sup>"Vietnam Report," San Francisco Chronicle, 31 January 1968, 1.

<sup>6</sup>"U.S. Armor Ambushed," San Jose Mercury, 1 January 1968, 1.

<sup>7</sup>"Outlook Grim," "S.J. Deserter on TV," and "Pope Sees Some Hope for Peace," Mercury, 1 January 1968, 1.

<sup>8</sup>"Public Forum," Mercury, 1 January 1968, 46. Douglas Mattern continues to be a regular contributor to the Letters to the Editor section of the San Jose Mercury.

<sup>9</sup>Barry Goldwater, "Hasta La Vista Columnist Bows Out," Mercury, 1 January 1968, 45.

<sup>10</sup>"5,084 In Two Weeks Red Death Toll May Be Viet Key," Mercury, 17 January 1968, 1. Of course, guerrilla tactics were a key to Communist strategy, but this point was lost somewhere along the line.

<sup>11</sup>"Guerrilla Gunfight U.S. Troops Bracket Cong in Jungle War," Mercury, 18 January 1968, 1; "Marine Victory 162 Reds Die in Viet 'Clash,'" Mercury, 19 January 1968, 1; and "240 Reds Killed By Marines," Mercury, 21 January 1968, 1.

<sup>12</sup>"'Bloodiest Truce' Cong Attack Kills 26 GI's," Mercury, 2 January 1968, 1; "In Coordination Reds Launch 7 Big Attacks," Mercury, 8 January 1968, 1;

and "Pouring in From Laos Red Forces Hurl Attack Along 'McNamara Wall'," Mercury, 22 January 1968, 1.

<sup>13</sup>"Bowles Tapped For Duty Envoy Will Go To Cambodia," Mercury, 4 January 1968, 1; "No 'Hot Pursuit' Cambodian Pact Made, Price Says," 11 January 1968, 1; "Success for U.S. Envoy A Border Deal With Cambodia," Mercury, 13 January 1968, 1; and "Into Cambodia U.S. Admits GI Crossing," Mercury, 23 January 1968, 1.

<sup>14</sup>"Pope Sees Some Hope for Peace," Mercury, 1 January 1968, 1; and "Peace Pressure Up," Mercury, 6 January 1968, 1.

<sup>15</sup>"End Raids, Then We'll Talk," Mercury, 2 January 1968, 1; "N. Viets Affirm Offer Clarification Via France," and "'What Do They Mean?' Hints Truce Violations," Mercury, 5 January 1968, 1; and "Peace Pressure Up," Mercury, 6 January 1968, 1.

<sup>16</sup>"Peking Puts Heat on Hanoi Against N. Viet Peace Moves," Mercury-News, 7 January 1968, 1.

<sup>17</sup>Harry Farrell "McCarthy Gets Big Welcome" and Don Muchmore "STATE POLL Big Gain In State For LBJ" Mercury-News, 16 January 1968, 1. Sen. Robert Kennedy would announce his candidacy in March.

<sup>18</sup>"Well Over Requirements Wallace, Peace Party Win Berths On Ballot," Mercury, 23 January 1968, 1. As it turned out, George Wallace captured 46 electoral college votes in the 1968 election. While not affecting the outcome of the election, these electoral college votes provide the historical footnote in that through the 1992 presidential election, no other third party candidate had received another.

<sup>19</sup> "Defense Chief Named McNamara's Successor" Mercury, 20 January 1968, 1.

<sup>20</sup>Clark M. Clifford. Council to the President, New York: Random House, 1991, 456-457.

<sup>21</sup> "Doctor Spock Indicted 'Incited Draft Evasions'," Mercury, 6 January 1968, 1.

<sup>22</sup>"Rusk Target of Mob, Nob Hill Scene of Rampage, Police Club Demonstrators," Mercury, 12 January 1968, 1.

23"With Anti-War Outburst Eartha Kitt Leaves Lady Bird in Tears," Mercury, 19 January 1968, 1; and "White House Affair Eartha Said 'What Was in My Heart'," Mercury, 20 January 1968, 1.

24"Into Cambodia U.S. Admits GI Crossing" and "Small U.S. Unit Quits Khe Sanh," Mercury, 23 January 1968, 1.

25"4 H-Bombs Missing After B52 Crashes," Mercury, 23 January 1968, 1. Within a few days all four hydrogen bombs were recovered. Ironically, in order to locate the highly sophisticated weapons, the air force required the use of teams of dog sleds.

26"U.S. Sending Task Force To No. Korea," Mercury, January 24, 1968, 1; and "Jet Fighter Squads Moved To S. Korea," Mercury, 24 January 1968, 1. One of the under appreciated effects of the Pueblo incident as it related to the media was that at the time it occurred it was of such monumental importance that networks and newspapers dispatched their best and most experienced correspondents from Saigon to cover the story. As a result, many of the war's most famous correspondents, including some who later wrote about the Tet Offensive, were actually out of the country when the offensive took place.

27Ibid.; Don Muchmore, "State Poll, LBJ Viet Approval Increasing," Mercury, 25 January 1968, 1. See also Chapter One.

28"Huge Red Attack On Yanks," Mercury, 30 January 1968, 1. Interestingly, the four-star and earlier editions gave the story more prominence by giving it a headline which encompassed four columns for a total of 12 column inches and by not running a banner over the masthead.

29Ibid.

30"Fear 16 Dead In Snow;" Gil Bailey, "May Ease Today Six-Inch Rain Floods Valley,"; and "Roads Blocked, 16 Feared Lost In Fierce Snow," Mercury, 31 January 1968, 1. Earlier editions gave the attack on the embassy as the lead story, foregoing the "Fear 16 Dead In Snow" banner above the masthead and replacing it with one which incorrectly announced, "Cong Seize U.S. Embassy."

31"GI's Kill Embassy Raiders," Mercury, 31 January 1968, 1.

32Ibid.

33Ibid.

34"Cong Roving Saigon;" and "Allies Bombing Cholon Red Assault Losses 5,000," Mercury, 1 February 1968, 1.

35Ibid.

36"To Meet Crisis White House Hints Call-Up," Mercury, 1 February 1968, 1. Although the North Korean and North Vietnamese Communists were very much in the news, the February 1, 1968 San Jose Mercury ran above the masthead a report by Bob Lindsey entitled "Military moves Watched On Sunnyvale Tube Red Army Stars 'Live' In Sky Spy TV" which dealt with the United States Air Force's use of satellite and television technology to monitor Soviet troop movements. It was also reported on February 1 that former Vice-President Richard Nixon officially announced his candidacy for the White House.

37"Door is Closed On Peace Try," Mercury, 6 February 1968, 1; and "Want Answer On Our Peace Offer - LBJ," Mercury, 13 February 1968, 1.

38"Secret Paris Talks Thant Meets Hanoi Aide," Mercury, 15 February 1968, 1.

39"Fatal Treachery U.S. Employees Helped Cong Invade Embassy," Mercury, 5 February 1968, 1; and "Rusk Warns of Climax Viet Cong Invade Town Behind 'Human Shields'," Mercury, 11 February 1968, 1.

40"300 In Atrocity Civilians Executed by Cong," Mercury, 12 February 1968, 1.

41George Gallup, "Gallup Poll: 45% Expecting War In Korea," Mercury, 11 February 1968, 2.

42"Hanoi Calls Khe Sanh A 'Dien Bien,'" Mercury, 11 February 1968, 2.

43"Marines Pinned at Hue," Mercury, 14 February 1968, 1; "Citadel Bombed In Hue U.S. Jests Also Hit Near Hanoi," Mercury, 15 February 1969, 1; "Still Hold Citadel," Mercury, 16 February 1968, 1; "Use Captured Tanks Reds Making Last Stand In Hue Fort," Mercury, 17 February 1968, 1; "Yanks Short of Men Battle for Hue in 21st Day," Mercury, 20 February 1968, 1; "GI's Fight Cong In Suburbs Marines Still Stymied at Hue," Mercury, 21 February 1968, 1; "Marines Capture Hue Wall Spearheaded by Napalm," Mercury, 23 February 1968, 1; and "Flag-raising," Mercury, 26 February 1968, 1. With the siege at Hue over, western media were able once again to focus attention on another siege which had begun before the Tet Offensive, the eventual stalemate at Khe Sanh. Reports from the marine base continued into March.

44"Air Base Hit Reds Launch 2nd Assault in 20 Towns," Mercury-News, 18 February 1968, 1; and "Cong Rocket Hits Airport, GI's Victims," Mercury, 19 February 1968, 1.

45"New Saigon Attack," Mercury, 21 February 1968, 1; "Battles Circle Saigon Capital Girds for Attacks," Mercury, 22 February 1968, 1; "Saigon Airbase Hit Again 4 Yanks Die, 31 Injured," Mercury, 24 February, 1968, 1; and "Fierce 'Wagon Train' Fight: Cong Repulsed," Mercury, 26 February 1968, 1.

46"Still Hold Citadel N. Viet Troops March on Hue," 16 Mercury, February 1968, 1; and "Worst of War 523 Yanks Killed in One Week," Mercury, 16 February 1968, 1.

47"Beret Victory Red Tanks Ambushed," Mercury, 27 February 1968, 1; and "Warplanes Pounding Reds U.S. Fighting in Laos," Mercury, 28 February 1968, 1.

48"North Viets Grab Laos Villages," Mercury, 27 February 1968, 1.

49"The Gallup Poll, Viet Cong Attacks Hurt LBJ's Popularity," Mercury, 18 February 1968, 1.

50"The Gallup Poll LBJ's Popularity in Sharp Decline," Mercury, 18 February 1968, 1.

51"McNamara Testifies Tonkin Gulf Action Probed," Mercury, 21 February 1968, 1; "Fullbright Charge; Congress Misled on Tonkin Gulf," Mercury, 22 February 1968, 1; "The Tonkin Affair Secret Navy Code Supports Morse," Mercury, 23 February 1968, 1; and "In Senate Questioning of McNamara," Mercury, 27 February 1968, 1.

52"Want Answer on Our Peace Offer - LBJ," Mercury, 13 February 1968, 1.

53"Secret Paris Talks Thant Meets Hanoi Aide," Mercury, 15 February 1968, 1; and "LBJ-Thant Talks Show No Progress," Mercury, 15 February 1968, 1.

Prior to his meetings in Paris and Washington D.C., Thant visited Moscow to discuss peace proposals with Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin.

54"10,500 On Way More GIs Speed to Viet War," Mercury, 14 February 1968, 1; and Wilbur H Morrison, The Elephant and the Tiger, (New York: Hippocrene Books), 1990, 377.

55"130,000 On Alert For Viet LBJ Pledges More Troops," Mercury, 23 February 1968, 1; and "Draft Call Hiked to 48,000 2nd Highest of Viet War," Mercury, 24 February 1968, 1.

56"Viet War Strategy Reviewed," Mercury, 29 February 1968, 1.

57"A Spectacular Bid...But," Mercury, 2 February 1968, 32Z.

58"Peace Talks Nearer," Mercury, 6 February 1968, 34Z.

59"Captured Viet Cong Talk," Mercury, 12 February 1968, 24; and "Far Different Opponent," Mercury, 13 February 1968, 34Z.

60"Thant Visit: Protocol is Served," Mercury, 22 February 1968, 34; "Reserve Call up Likely," Mercury, 24 February 1968, 22; and "A Time For Testing" Mercury, 27 February 1968, 18.

61"Public Forum," Mercury, 13 February 1968, 34Z; and 27 February 1968, 34Z.

62Drew Pearson, "Washington Merry-Go-Round," Mercury, 28 January 1968-11 February 1968.

63Jack Anderson, "Washington Merry-Go-Round," Mercury, 24 February 1968-29 February 1968.

64James Reston, "Probably Not 'Last Gasp,'" Mercury, 2 February 1968, 22; and "Is Viet Victory Possible?," Mercury 7 February 1968, 30.

65Joseph Alsop, "The Struggle for Khe Sanh," Mercury, 29 January 1968, 18; "Hanoi Go For Broke," Mercury, 9 February 1968, 23; "Going For Broke," Mercury, 19 February 1968, 12; "General Giap Failed," Mercury, 26 February 1968, 18; and "For Final Round in Vietnam," Mercury, 29 February 1968, 34.

66Russell Baker, "The Vital Mission of O.O.P.," Mercury, 13 February 1968, 34Z; Tom Wicker, "In The Nation," Mercury, 25 February 1968, 2F; and Chick Sulzberger, "Vietnam: Strategy of Error," Mercury, 29 February 1968, 28.

67Roscoe Drummond, "V.C. Setbacks Changed Shape of War," Mercury, 19 February 1968, 13; "Lesson From Hanoi," Mercury, 22 February 1968, 35; and "Time Running Against Reds, Shape of Viet War Radically Altered" Mercury, 23 February 1968, 23.

<sup>68</sup>William F. Buckley, "A-Bomb Use Overdue," Mercury 23 February 1968, 23.

<sup>69</sup>"War's Very Objective is Victory....," Mercury, 29 January 1968, 18.

<sup>70</sup>Don Hesse, "Let Us Reason Together," Mercury, 19 February 1968, 12; and Shoemaker, "A Tiring Beat," Mercury, 23 February 1968, 22.

<sup>71</sup>"Nixon's Hat Tossed in N.H. Ring," Mercury, 1 February 1968, 1; and "Nixon Enters the Race," Mercury, 2 February 1968, 1.

<sup>72</sup>"Tough Dallas Speech At Turning Point in War--LBJ," Mercury, 28 February 1968, 1.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Immediately following the Tet Offensive, the Vietnam War coverage on the front page of the San Jose Mercury and Mercury-News reached a heretofore unparalleled level. As has been shown, total column inches dedicated to photographs, banners, and news articles related to the conflict increased dramatically. However, it does not necessarily follow that the depth or the breadth of the coverage increased.

Wire service stories which made up the bulk of the Mercury and News reporting focused on the events in and around a few key sites--Saigon, Hue, and Khe Sanh. Omitted from the coverage were stories of over 100 engagements throughout South Vietnam in which Viet Cong and North Vietnamese aggression was quickly and convincingly repelled. In fairness to the reporters, these confrontations were typically brief encounters with relatively few people involved in remote areas. Nevertheless, omission of even scant reference to these events, particularly in light of the great number involved, served greatly to skew the picture presented to the reading public.

On the other side of the coin, the long-term psychological effect of the attack on the American Embassy in Saigon, a "one-day event" which was given considerable television coverage, cannot begin to be appreciated from the scant newspaper treatment it received. It is perhaps for this reason that newspaper writers Don Oberdorfer and Stanley Karnow would later write extensively on the event.

That the picture was skewed did not have as great an impact as journalists would have us believe. Public opinion polls during the previous three years had demonstrated that the American people were clearly turning against the war. By January 1968, before the Tet Offensive began, pollsters were showing that for the first time since polling began, a majority of those polled opposed the Vietnam War. Reaction to the Tet Offensive actually brought a dramatic, albeit brief, reversal to the trend and in February 1968, the majority was again in favor of American presence in Vietnam. Opposition to the war would return to the majority the following month, never to relinquish its dominant position again.

The nature of Vietnam-related front page articles also changed during February 1968. Whereas in January most articles either dealt with the everyday business of the war, complete with body counts, and the actions of members of the peace movement in the United States, by February the grassroots peace movement had disappeared from the front page to be replaced with official diplomatic overtures toward peace negotiations from the United Nations, the Soviet Union, North Vietnam, France, and the United States. Meanwhile, war became hell, with the protracted action at Hue and at Khe Sanh being described in grim terms day after day throughout the first half of the month.

It would be incorrect to attribute the change in tenor in war reporting solely to the Tet Offensive. A number of other factors also affected the mood of the nation, hence the editorial content. The two most significant were the spate of military embarrassments endured by the United States throughout the world during January, and the heating up of the presidential campaigns and the rhetoric which accompanied them.

Prior to the Tet Offensive, a series of mishaps befell the United States. The most significant of these was the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo by the Koreans in late January. This event, like the loss of four hydrogen bombs in Greenland one week earlier, caused President Johnson to lose face around the globe. Meanwhile, the beginning of the year brought about the beginning of the presidential campaign. Peace candidate Senator Eugene McCarthy's enthusiastic and well reported welcome in California signaled a schism within the president's party. Senator Robert Kennedy, while not yet officially a candidate, also became more outspoken and determined in calling for an end to the bloodshed. In the opposition party, Richard Nixon's campaign coalesced around a secret plan to end the war.

That the Tet Offensive was the turning point of the Vietnam war has been argued by scholars for twenty-five years. What the front pages of the San Jose Mercury and Mercury-News in January and February 1968 demonstrate is that to the local newspaper reader in 1968 the uprising could more properly be considered a catalytic event which served greatly to accelerate current trends. They show that although reports from Vietnam following the uprising tended to be longer, and harder edged than those before, this type of reporting was consistent with that which had begun some time before. The increased lineage also corresponded with the dramatic increase in American press personnel covering the conflict. Furthermore, the Tet Offensive was just one of many dramatic events which occurred at roughly the same crucial juncture in the history of the Vietnam War that American opposition to the war overcame support. Much of the reporting of the time merely reflected this evolution in opinion.

On the other hand, readers of the editorial page might very well conclude that the Tet Offensive was a turning point, but they would be incorrect in how the war was in fact turning. A common theme of the editorials during February 1968 was that the Communists were making a last ditch effort before succumbing to the superior allied forces. History has shown that events were not to play out as the pundits predicted.

While those who support the turning point theory are quick to point out Walter Cronkite's post-Tet epiphany regarding the futility of the conflict, from following the local newspaper the reader would realize that the CBS newsman, in departing from the views of his print colleagues, had joined what had a month earlier become the majority view of the general public. In the final analysis, the Mercury and Mercury-News reflected that while the actions associated with the Tet Offensive were important enough to warrant additional coverage and editorial comment, the full impact of the events were not yet understood. However, it can also be determined from how the information (and misinformation) was presented that the events were not in themselves a turning point, but parts of a more complex puzzle which together led to a subsequent resurgence of opposition to the war, an opposition which had, prior to the Tet Offensive, been increasing since 1965.

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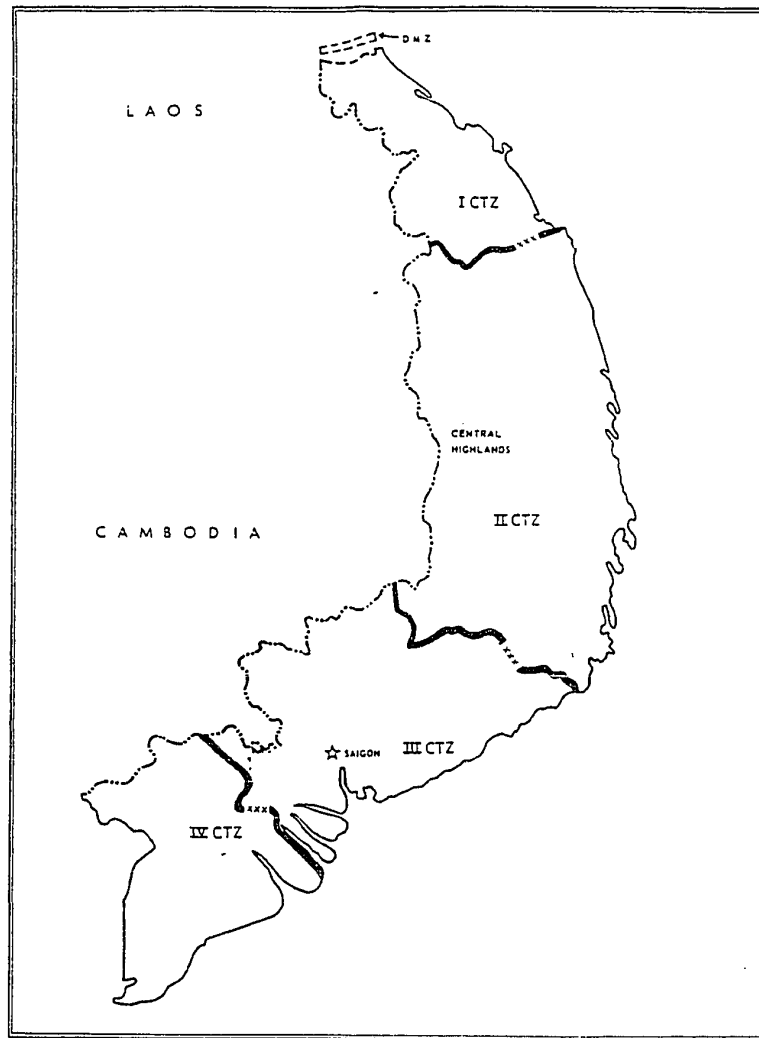
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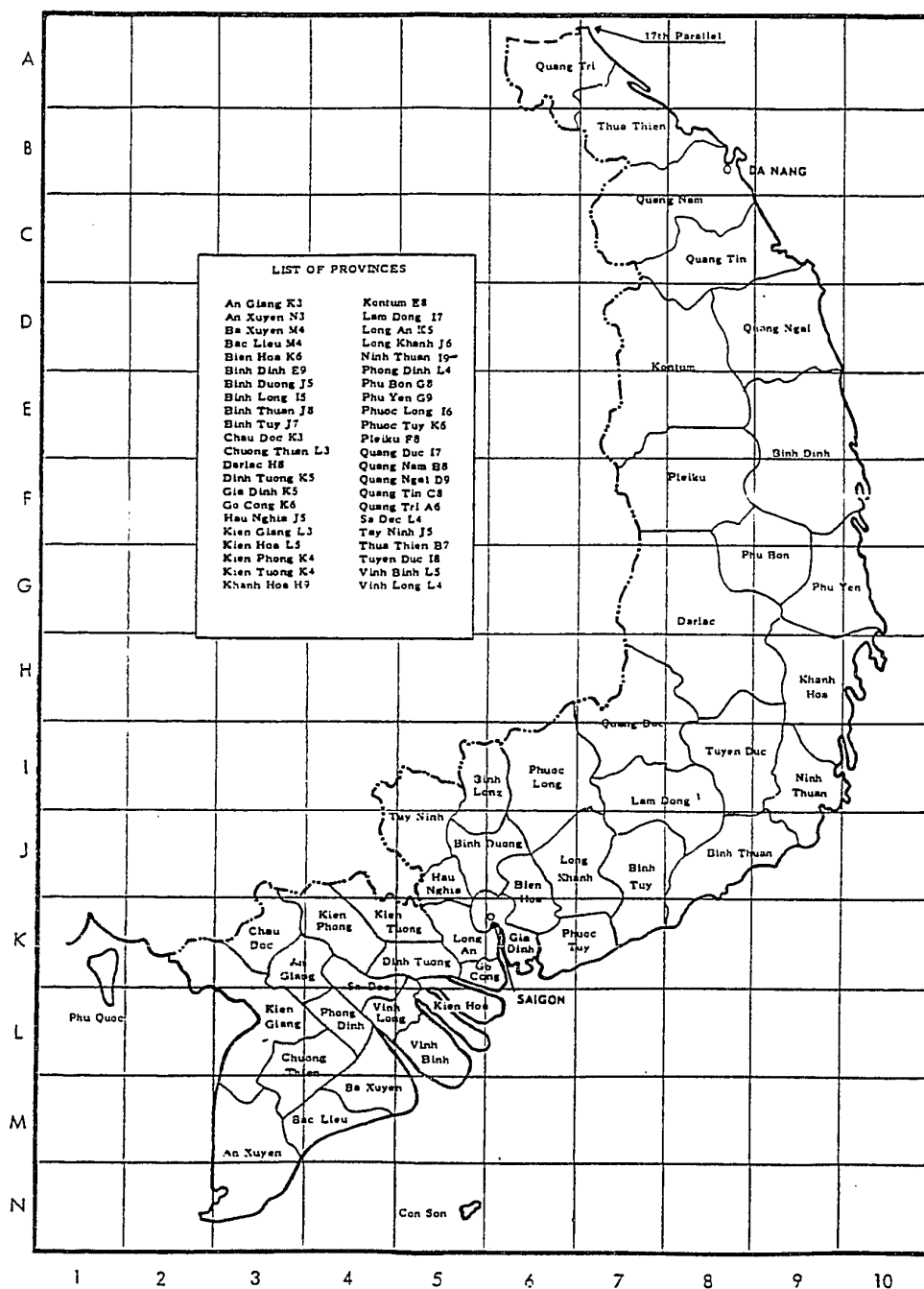
## APPENDIX A

### MAPS

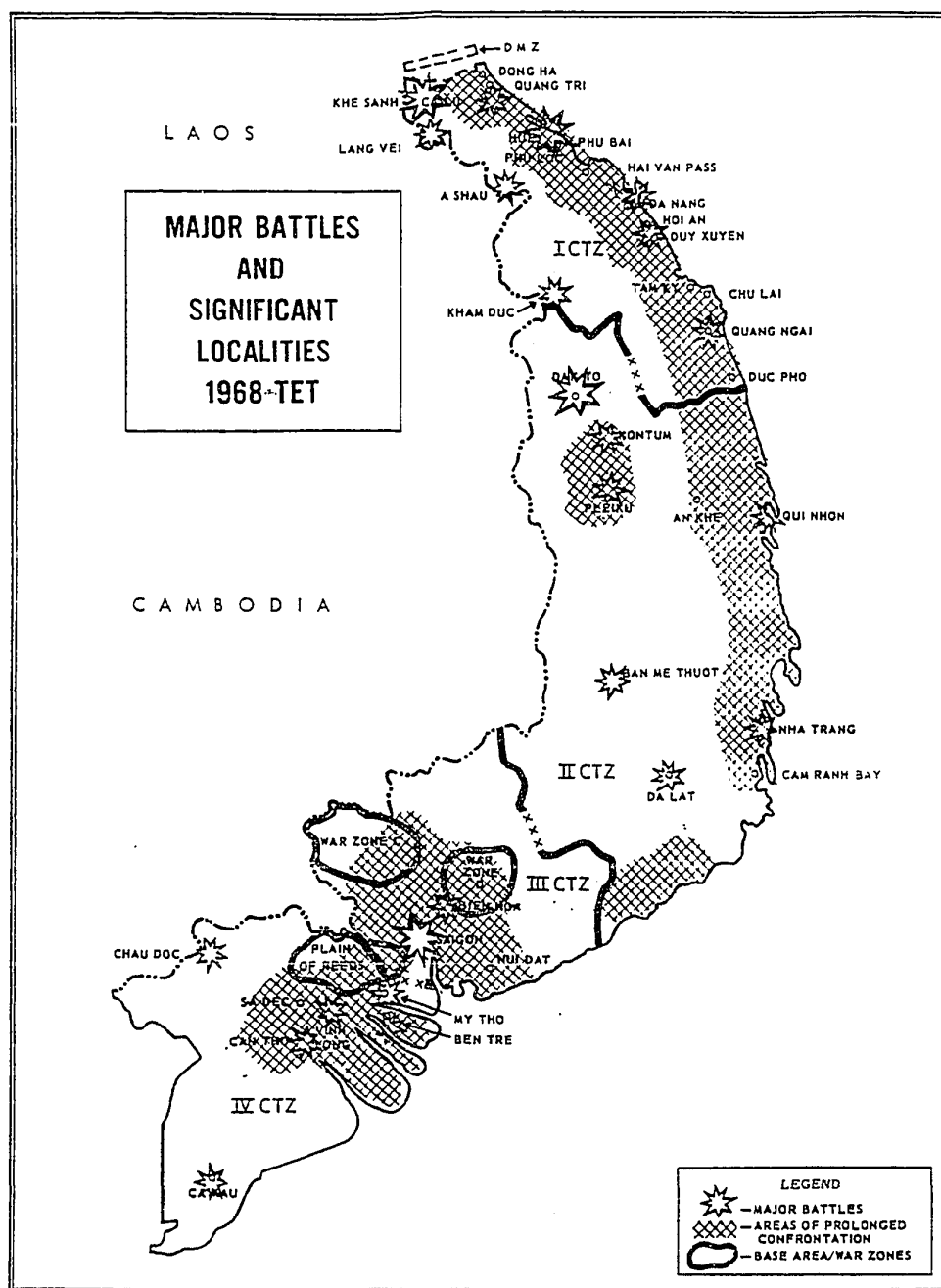
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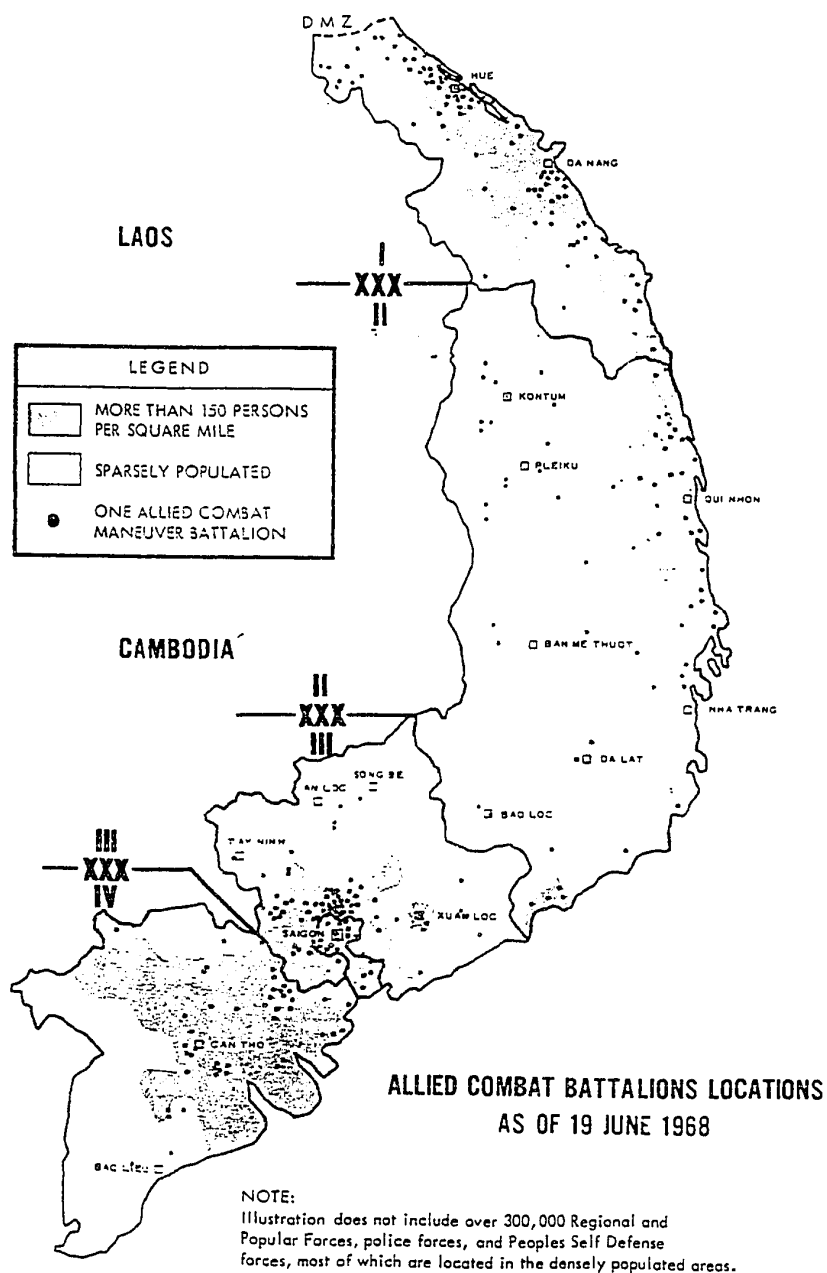
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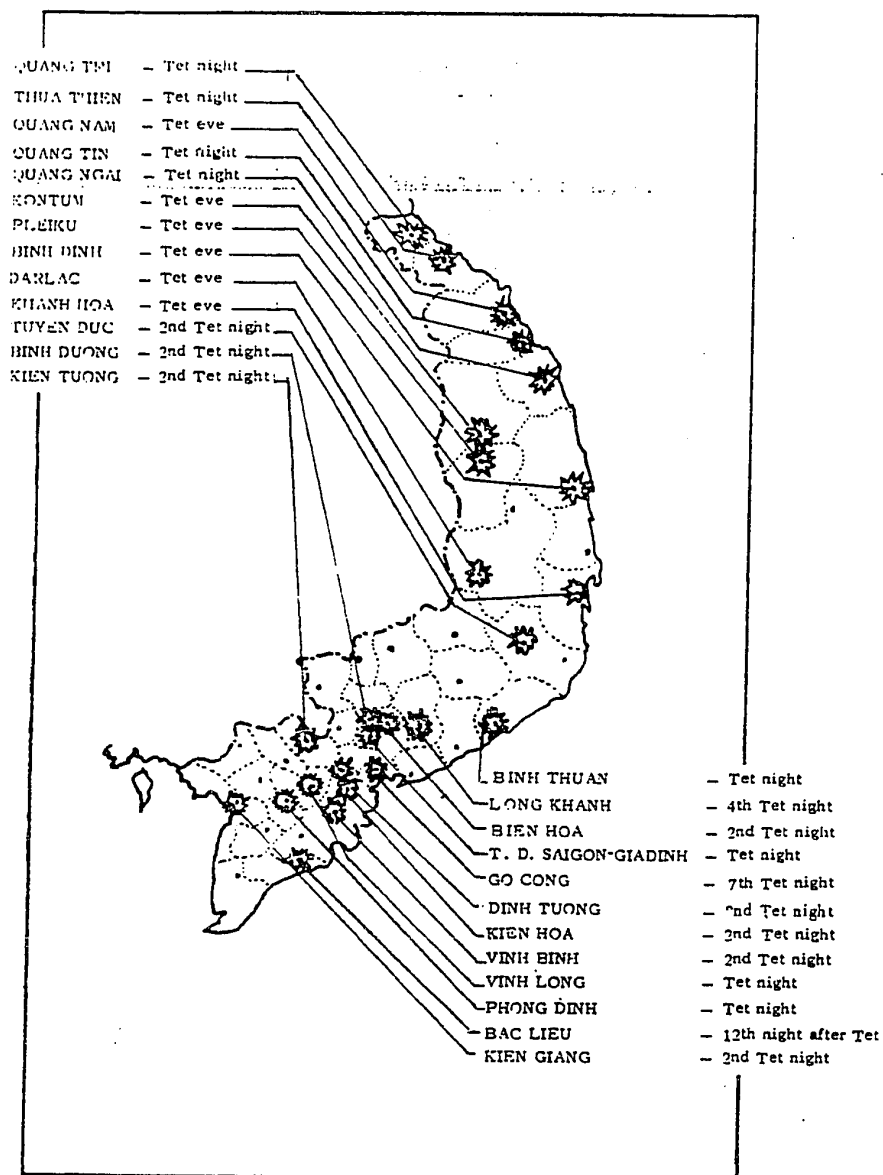
**Source:** Adm. U. S. G. Sharp and Gen. W. C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam, (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1968), 348 opposite.



**Source:** Adm. U. S. G. Sharp and Gen. W. C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam, (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1968), 188 opposite.



**Source:** Adm. U. S. G. Sharp and Gen. W. C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam, (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1968), 181.



CITIES ATTACKED BY VIET CONG DURING TET (1968)

Source: Lt. Col. Pham Van Son, Tet-1968, (Salisbury, N.C., Documentary Publications, 1980), 21.

## APPENDIX B

### CAPTURED ENEMY DOCUMENTS

The following are excerpts from a full translation of enemy documents which related directly with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong plans of attack during the Winter-Spring Offensive of 1967-1968. The first, captured on August 28, 1969 in South Vietnam contains detailed information of a plan of attack during the "1968 General Offensive and Uprising Campaign," including the destruction of Government of Vietnam's administrative machinery and the pursuit of spies and reactionaries. The second provides instructions to the cadres entering Saigon. These instructions describe the six methods of fighting in which the troops should engage themselves. The third captured document is the attack order from the Presidium of the Central Committee National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam.

Note: Several pages are missing from the original text. Gaps in the text are noted. Additionally, many words have been deleted. As in the original, these deleted words have been marked as in the original documents as follows: #####.

## PLANS FOR THE OFFENSIVE AND UPRISING OF MUI A (#####)

### I. GENERAL MISSIONS:

1. To destroy and disorganize the enemy's restrictive administrative machinery from the province and district levels to city wards, streets, and wharves. To pursue until the end spies, reactionaries, and reactionaries who exploit Catholics in and outside the country. To prevent them from escaping and to punish scoundrels, hoodlums, and robbers, who kill the people and disturb peace and order.
2. Motivate the people to take up arms, to pursue the enemy, and to seize power and establish a revolutionary government.
3. Make every effort to establish strength in the military, political, and economic fields in order to conserve the government.. Our immediate mission is to pay particular attention to armed and security forces.
4. Make positive efforts to develop ##### in the city wards, streets, and wharves in order to expand the guerrilla war.
5. We should encircle the reactionaries who exploit Catholics and isolate them. Pay attention to Phu Cam area, Thien Huu and Binh Linh Schools, and at the same time, try to gain the support of the Buddhist sects of Tu Dam and Bao Quoc pagodas.
6. Promptly motivate the people to participate in combat, transportation, and supply activities and to serve wounded soldiers etc., [sic.]
7. Maintain order and security in the city and stabilize the people's living conditions.

### II. FUNDAMENTAL GUIDELINES:

1. Coordinate military, political, and troop proselytizing activities. Emphasis should be placed on our strength for self-liberation and gaining the control of the people.

2. Coordinate activities between overt and covert forces. Carry out the immediate combat mission. At the same time, make preparations for a long-range struggle.

[several pages later in the translation]

VII. A NUMBER OF SPECIFIC TASKS TO BE FULFILLED FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR PLAN:

1. Each individual should fully understand his mission and strengthen his determination to overcome all difficulties.
2. Absolutely keep the plan secret.
3. Each cell should use the general plan to make a specific plan for itself. The plan should be urgent, specific, and accurate. Negligent and effortless planning should be avoided.
4. Properly execute the orders of higher echelons and absolutely believe them.
5. We should be brave and courageous to fight under any circumstances. We should counter sluggishness and weariness to prepare for the long-term fight, [sic.]
6. Properly execute all regulations and policies that have been stipulated in liberated areas, such as to avoid corruption, indiscriminate arrests, assassinations, and revenge.
7. We should be aware of the enemy scheme and avoid unnecessary relationships while executing the mission. We should maintain solidarity and effective coordination.
8. We should intensively initiate a broad ideological campaign among the people and rely on the basic social class to carry out our mission.
9. All cadre and personnel participating in the General Offensive and Uprising must fulfill their missions in the names of the Liberation Army, as for the force recruited in the city, we will call it the Uprising Force.
10. Passwords and codes (will be sent later).

VIII. AWARDS AND DISCIPLINE:

Cadre and personnel who properly execute the regulations and policies of higher echelons will be recommended for awards. Otherwise, appropriate disciplinary measures will be taken against them.



# IX. SCHEDULE FOR TASK PERFORMANCE.\* [sic.]

During the first day and first night: We should attack the enemy at any cost to encircle, pursue, and prevent him from escaping; then occupy all key objectives.

During the first night : [sic.]

- Continue to pursue the enemy, [sic.]
- Move all enemy documents and property out of the operation area including the wounded soldiers who fought during the first day.
- Motivate the people to rise and support the troops on the battlefield.
- Deploy our troops to guard all enemy key agencies, entrances, an exit points in the city. Closely coordinate with all of our units to protect the city (K4)

((page 8 of O. T.))

During the second day and night:

- Continue to operate the same as of the previous day and night.
- Mobilize the people to build up defensive fortifications and combat street wards.
- Maintain public order and security in the city [sic.]
- Initiate a sanitation movement in the city. (Bury dead bodies). [sic.]

During the third day:

- Continue to operate and force the (####) government employees to report themselves to us. Then, initiate a broad ideological campaign among them. Classify their education, assign duties to them, and begin to establish the revolutionary machinery in the city [sic.]

26 January 1968

Leadership Committee

**Source:** Captured Enemy Document, "Plans for the Offensive and Uprising of Mui A (#####)," pp. 1, 11-12 (pp. 1, 7-8 of the original text), File A/St, Date 1/68. Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA.

Note: The following instructions to the cadres infiltrating Saigon is replete with errors, some of which were caused by the transcriber. Those errors have not been noted. When [sic] [*sic.*] appears in the document, it is as provided by the transcriber.

- Stationing in the people's houses, causing hinderances [*sic.*] to the people.
- Taking war booty as one's own property.
- Firing indiscriminately, creating confusion and fear among the people.
- Having prejudices against the urban people, shunning them, considering them as extremely backward [sic].
- Moving aimlessly through the town [or city], looking at everything [met on the way].
- Purchasing [commoditiies] or eating [food] at inns and restaurants without paying for them.
- Damaging the people's property
- Disliking [at first] the forms adopted by the urban people, but later, imitating them: learning to salute, to walk and to dress like urban people do.
- Counting on the merit of liberating the town [or city] to disregard the orders of the Politico-Military Committee, Some soldiers hold up their faces and ask: "Who liberated this town [or city] ?."
- Lacking vigilance on guard duty.

**Source:** Captured Enemy Document, "VC/NVA Offensive Techniques in Cities and Towns," CDEC Doc Log No. 08-0502-68, p. 33 (of the original text), File A, Sub GVN, Date 1968, Indochina Archives, Emeryville, CA.

In addition to the prohibitions to the cadres entering Saigon, instructions consistent with those of the other attacks undertaken during the Tet offensive, were also given them. These instructions described the six methods of fighting in which the troops should engage themselves:

1. Strengthen the military activities of the Concentrated force. Conduct medium and large scale campaigns in preparation for operations having a strategic effect or which are essential to gain military superiority in certain areas, or enable the total destruction [*sic.*] of US battalions and puppet battle groups. Operations may be conducted under the form of attacks or counter-attacks.
2. Advance guerrilla warfare. Partially destroy the enemy's force. Wear down and disperse him.
- (3.) [*sic.*] Frustrate all his sweep operations and pacification schemes. Protect the people's lives and property. Exert pressure on the cities and on the enemy's military bases.
4. Sabotage all of the enemy's important waterways and routes of Communications. In enemy area, battlefield and town, try to divide and encircle the enemy in order to gradually reduce him to the defensive, and minimize his reinforcement capability.
5. Increase our military activities in the towns, beginning from small operations, conducted in conjunction with the political struggle, to large scale operations, in conjunction with uprising activities.
6. Military activity conducted in conjunction with the military revolt. Proselyte the enemy and the puppet personnel. Strategic proselytizing activities, on a large scale, should be conducted to cause disorganization and serious revolt in the ranks of the puppet troops. This will also create an anti-war movement among the US military personnel, which will be linked to the anti-war movement waged by the American people.<sup>53</sup>

**Source:** Captured Enemy Document, "Concept of the General Offensive," CDEC Doc Log No. 06-1427-68, p. 13 (of the original text), Indochina Archives, File A, Sub GVN, Date 1968.

Attack Order from the Presidium of the Central Committee National Front for the  
Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSVN)

To: All Cadre and Men of the Liberation Army

Compatriots:

In the wake of the successive victories achieved during the past few years, the situation at home and throughout the world is favorable to the revolutionary task being undertaken by our people. The confused Americans are bogged down and are hurting badly. The puppet army, a mercenary instrument at the Americans' disposal, is well on its way to complete disruption. The corrupt and ineffective stooge is increasingly exhibiting its traitorous nature. Our revolutionary forces have attained full-fledged maturity and have become unprecedentedly powerful. North Vietnam, the major rear base of the South, is unceasingly consolidated; is dealing the most stunning blows to the American aggressors in their war of destruction; and, together with the South, is doing its utmost to fight the Americans for the country's salvation. Our friends all over the world, including the progressive American people, sympathize with and support us wholeheartedly.

We are confronted with an extremely profitable situation. The Presidium of the Central Committee, NFLSVN, has decided to launch a full-scale attack to defeat the enemy and to return the government to the people.

All military forces of the Liberation Army and militant political forces are ordered to collaborate closely with different patriotic forces and the entire population to simultaneously dash forward to:

- Wipe out a good deal of enemy potential, defeat the American and satellite troops, and disrupt the puppet army;

- Overthrow all levels of the stooge government and drastically punish all high echelon traitors and all "tyrants";

- Establish the people's revolutionary government at all levels, strive to defend the [revolutionary] government, resolutely smash all enemy attempts at counter-offensive under all circumstances; And implement all policies that have been laid down by the Front.

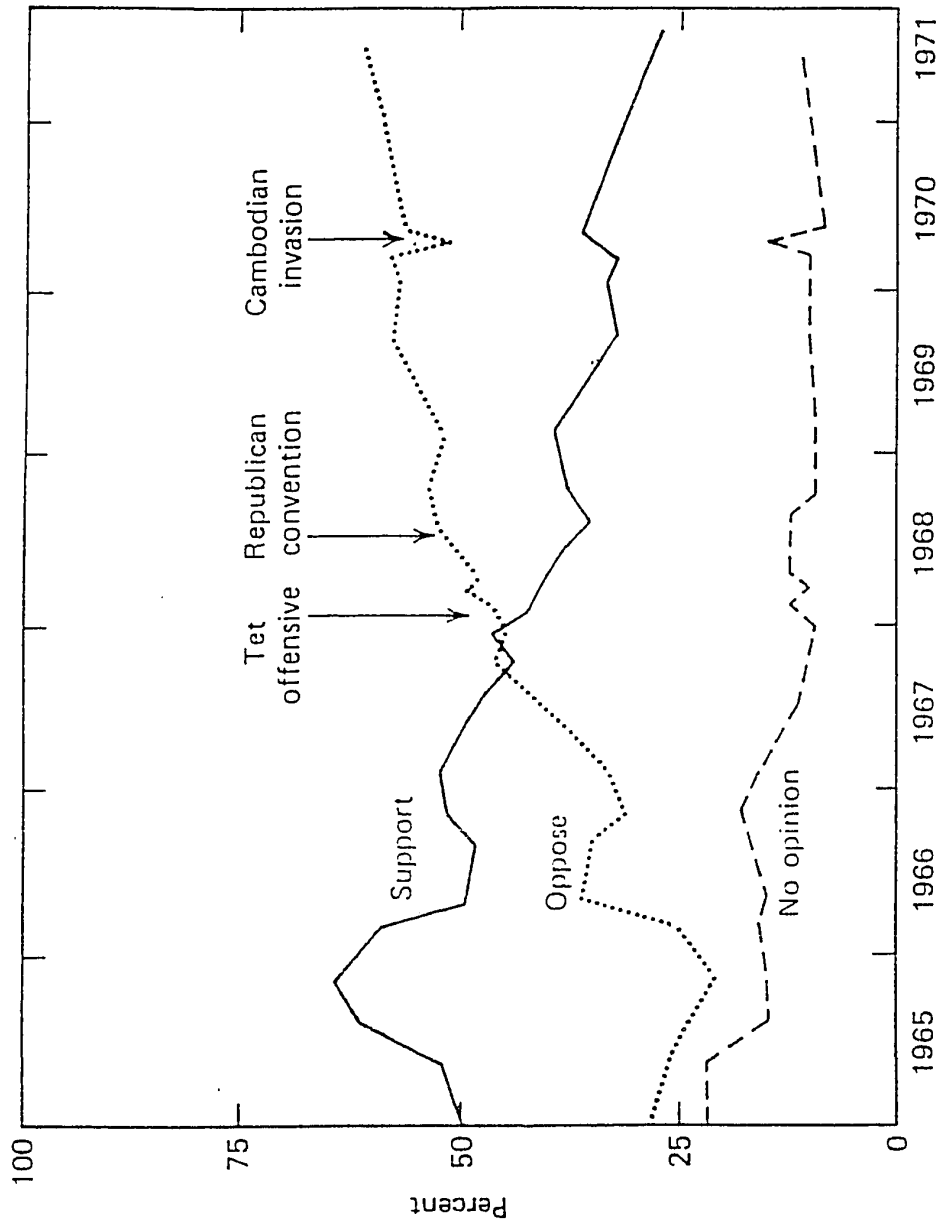
Compatriots, cadre and men:

Courageously march forward.

We are bound to score full victory.

**Source:** "NLF Statement on Tet 68 Offensive," Indochina Archives, January 1968.

# APPENDIX C PUBLIC OPINION POLLS



## OVERALL TRENDS IN SUPPORT FOR THE WAR IN VIETNAM

Source: John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 1973, 56.

**TABLE ONE**  
**TRENDS IN SUPPORT FOR THE WAR IN VIETNAM**  
 American Institute for Public Opinion, The Gallup Organization

Date	Question A			Question B			Question C		
	S	O	U	S	O	U	S	O	U
November, 1964							47	30	23
January, 1965				50	28	22			
May, 1965				52	26	22			
August, 1965	61	24	15						
November, 1965				64	21	15			
March, 1966	59	25	16						
May, 1966	49	36	15						
September, 1966	48	35	17						
November, 1966	51	31	18				47	31	22
Early Feb., 1967	52	32	16						
May, 1967	50	37	13						
July, 1967	48	41	11						
October, 1967	44	46	10						
December, 1967	46	45	9						
Early Feb., 1968	42	46	12						
March, 1968	41	49	10						
August, 1968	35	53	12						
Early Oct., 1968	37	54	9				30	52	18
February, 1969	39	52	9						
September, 1969	32	58	10						
January, 1970	33	57	10						
April, 1970	34	51	15						
May, 1970	36	56	8						
November, 1970							30	49	20
January, 1971	31	59	10						
May, 1971	28	61	11						

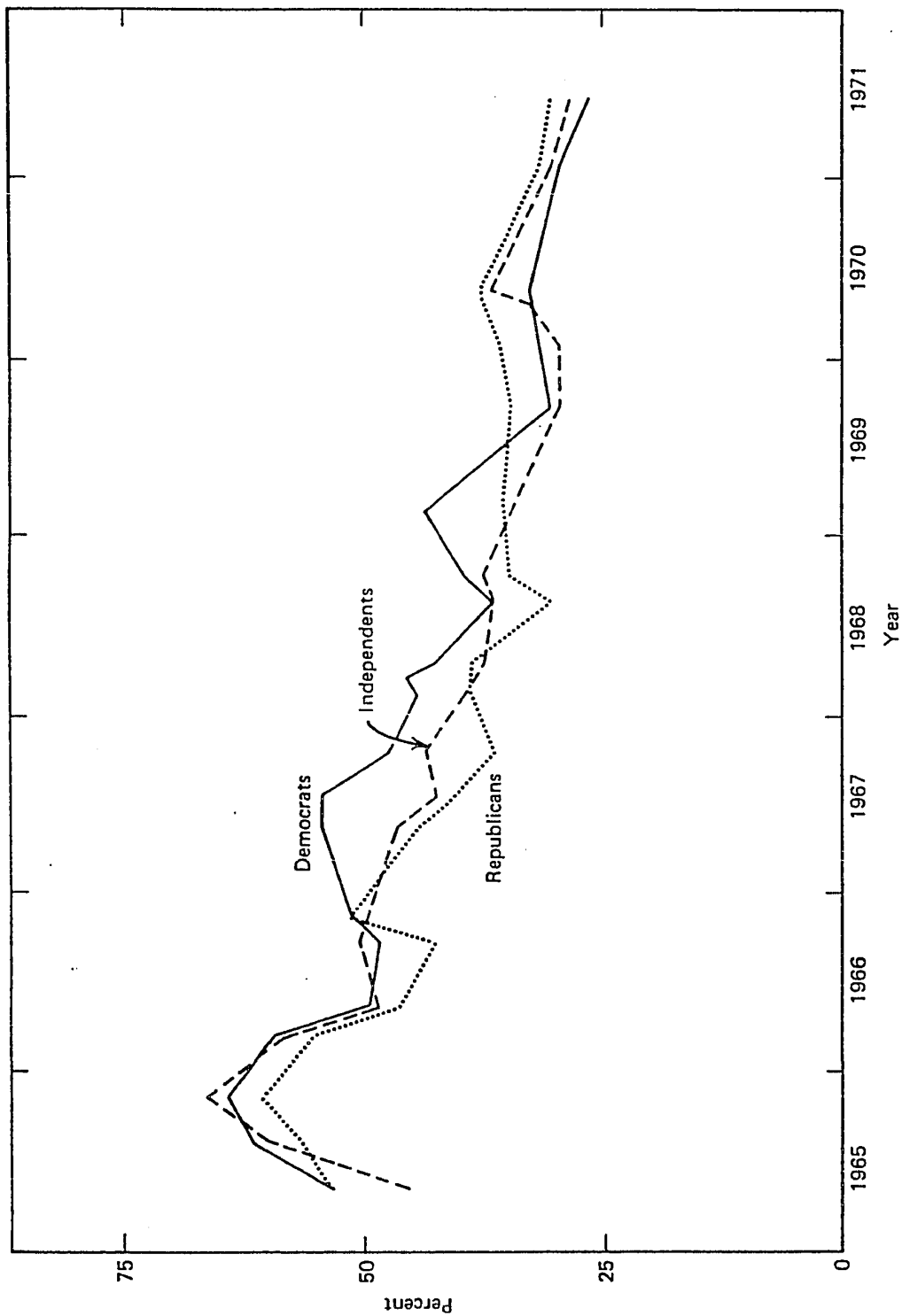
**Key:** S=Support, O=Opposed, U=Undecided

A: "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U. S. made a mistake in sending troops to Vietnam?"

B: "Some people think we should not have become involved with our military forces in Southeast Asia, while others think we should have. What is your opinion?"

C: "Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Vietnam or should we have stayed out?" (In 1964 and 1966 asked only of those who said they had been paying attention to what was going on in Vietnam--80% of the sample in 1964, 93% in 1966).

**Source:** John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), p. 54-55.



### TRENDS IN SUPPORT FOR THE WAR IN VIETNAM BY PARTY

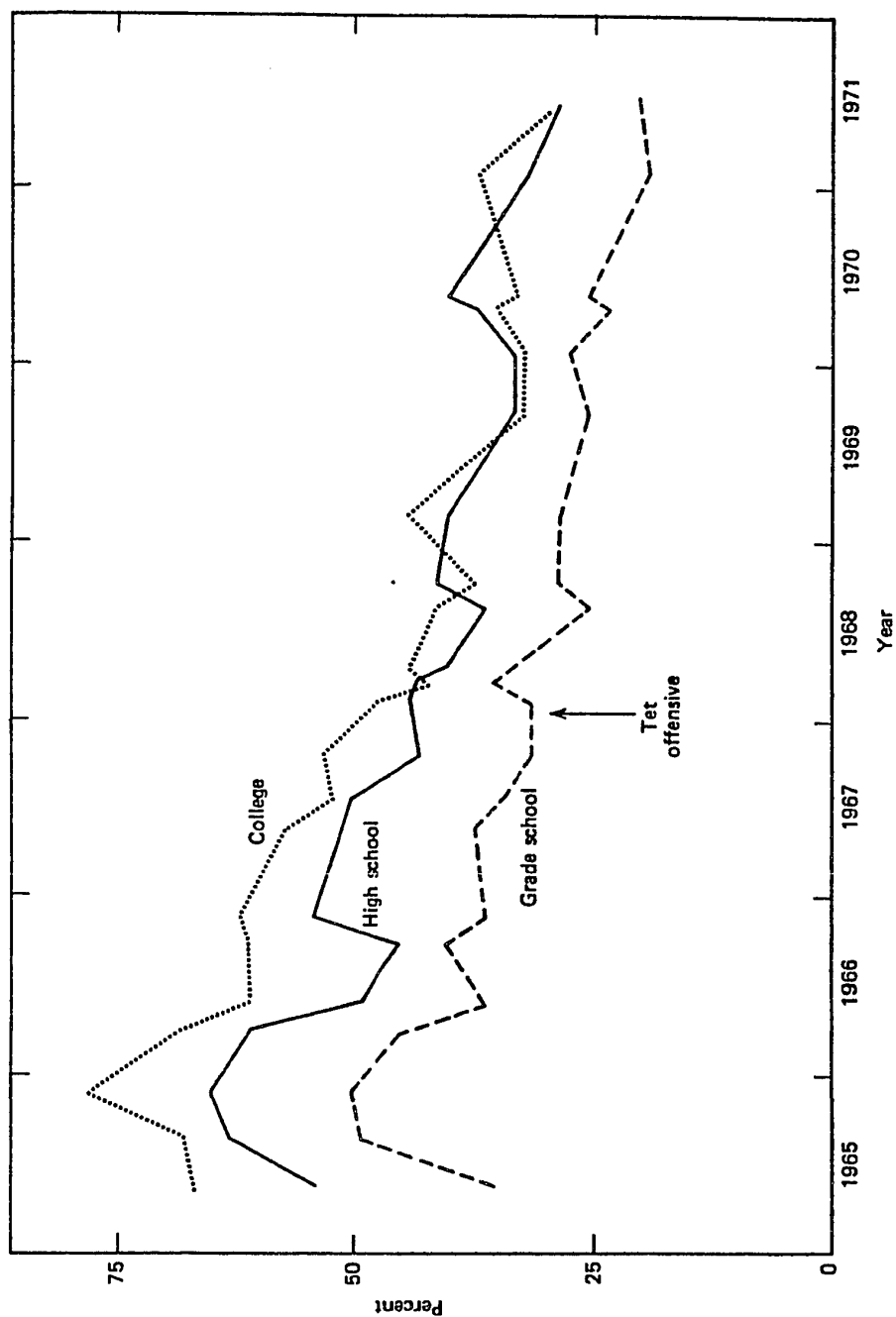
**TABLE TWO**  
**SUPPORT FOR THE VIETNAM WAR BY PARTY**  
 American Institute for Public Opinion, The Gallup Organization

Date	PARTY								
	Republican			Democrat			Independent		
	S	O	U	S	O	U	S	O	U
May, 1965	54	27	19	54	25	21	46	29	25
August, 1965	57	28	16	62	22	16	60	26	14
November, 1965	61	25	14	65	18	17	67	21	12
March, 1966	56	27	17	60	24	16	59	27	14
May, 1966	47	42	11	50	32	18	49	37	14
September, 1966	43	42	15	49	32	19	51	32	17
November, 1966	52	34	14	52	28	20	50	32	18
May, 1967	45	43	12	55	31	14	47	41	12
July, 1967	41	51	8	55	33	12	43	46	11
October, 1967	37	54	9	48	41	11	44	48	8
Early Feb., 1968	39	53	8	45	41	14	40	47	13
March, 1968	39	53	8	46	43	11	39	54	7
April, 1968	39	52	9	43	43	14	38	52	10
August, 1968	31	58	11	37	50	13	37	54	9
Early Oct., 1968	35	57	8	40	52	8	38	53	9
February, 1969	36	54	10	44	47	9	35	59	6
September, 1969	35	57	8	31	59	10	30	60	10
January, 1970	36	53	11	32	56	12	30	64	6
April, 1970	38	49	13	33	49	18	33	57	10
March, 1970	38	54	8	33	58	9	37	55	8
January, 1971	32	61	7	30	59	11	31	60	9
May, 1971	31	58	11	27	64	9	29	60	11

**Key:** S=Support, O=Opposed, U=Undecided

**Source:** John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), p. 271.





## TRENDS IN SUPPORT FOR THE WAR IN VIETNAM BY EDUCATION

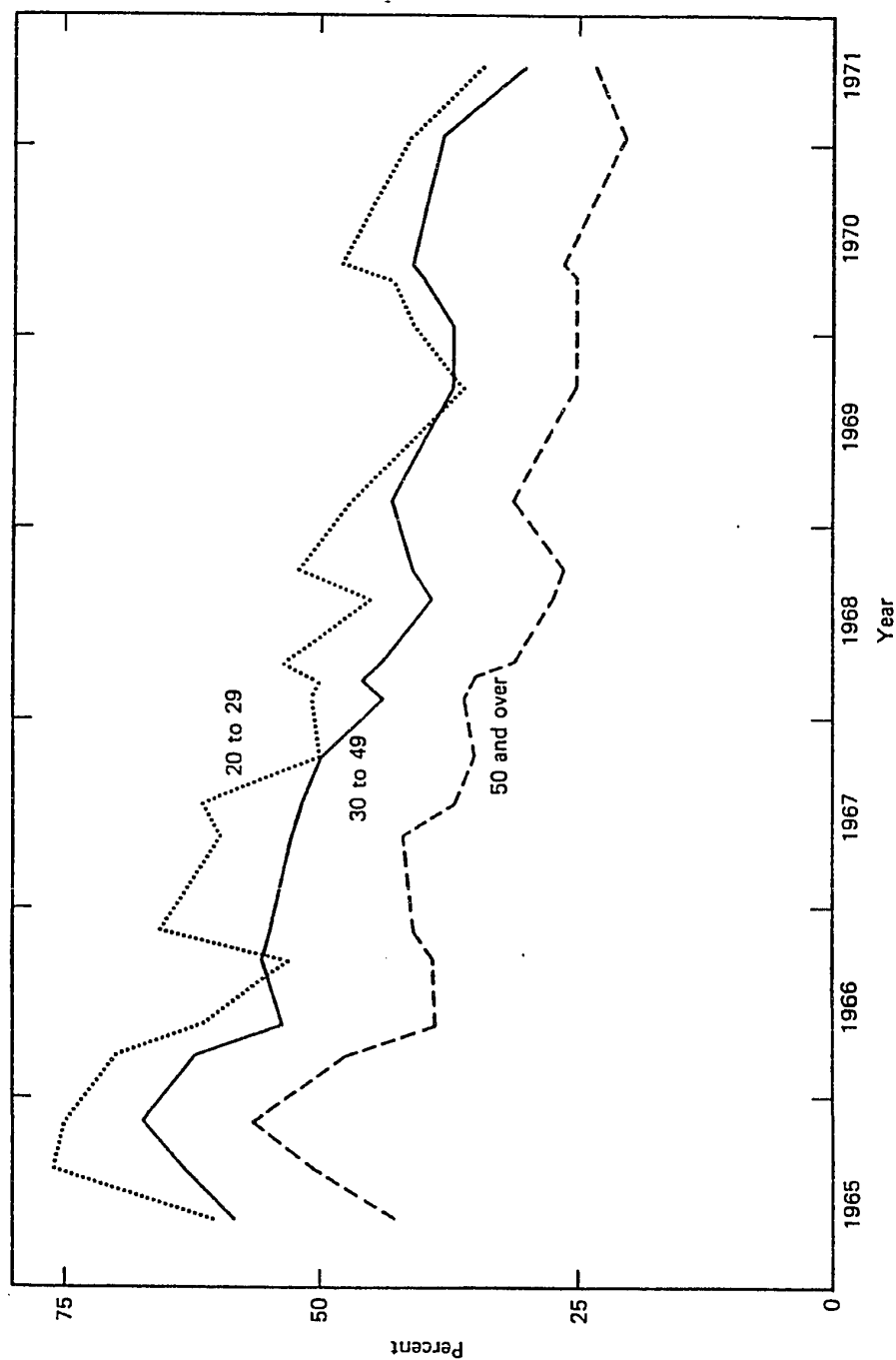
Source: John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 1973, 125.

**TABLE THREE**  
**SUPPORT FOR THE VIETNAM WAR BY EDUCATION**  
 American Institute for Public Opinion, The Gallup Organization

Date	EDUCATION								
	College			High School			Grade School		
	S	O	U	S	O	U	S	O	U
May, 1965	68	20	12	55	25	20	36	31	33
August, 1965	69	24	8	64	22	14	50	28	22
November, 1965	79	15	6	66	19	15	51	29	20
March, 1966	70	22	8	62	25	13	46	29	25
May, 1966	62	31	7	50	37	13	37	38	25
September, 1966	62	29	9	46	36	18	41	38	21
November, 1966	63	26	11	55	30	15	37	35	28
May, 1967	58	34	8	52	34	14	38	45	17
July, 1967	53	42	5	51	37	12	35	49	16
October, 1967	54	41	5	44	48	8	32	50	18
Early Feb., 1968	48	47	5	45	45	10	32	46	22
March, 1968	43	52	5	44	48	8	36	48	16
April, 1968	45	48	7	41	49	10	34	47	19
August, 1968	42	53	5	37	50	13	26	60	14
Early Oct., 1968	38	57	5	42	50	8	29	57	14
February, 1969	45	50	5	41	51	8	29	56	15
September, 1969	33	64	3	34	56	10	26	59	15
January, 1970	33	60	7	34	56	10	28	58	14
April, 1970	36	55	9	38	47	15	24	53	23
March, 1970	34	59	7	41	53	6	26	60	14
January, 1971	38	58	4	33	58	9	20	64	16
May, 1971	31	60	9	30	61	9	21	63	16

**Key:** S=Support, O=Opposed, U=Undecided

**Source:** John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), p. 273.



### TRENDS IN SUPPORT FOR THE WAR IN VIETNAM BY AGE

Source: John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 1973, 139.

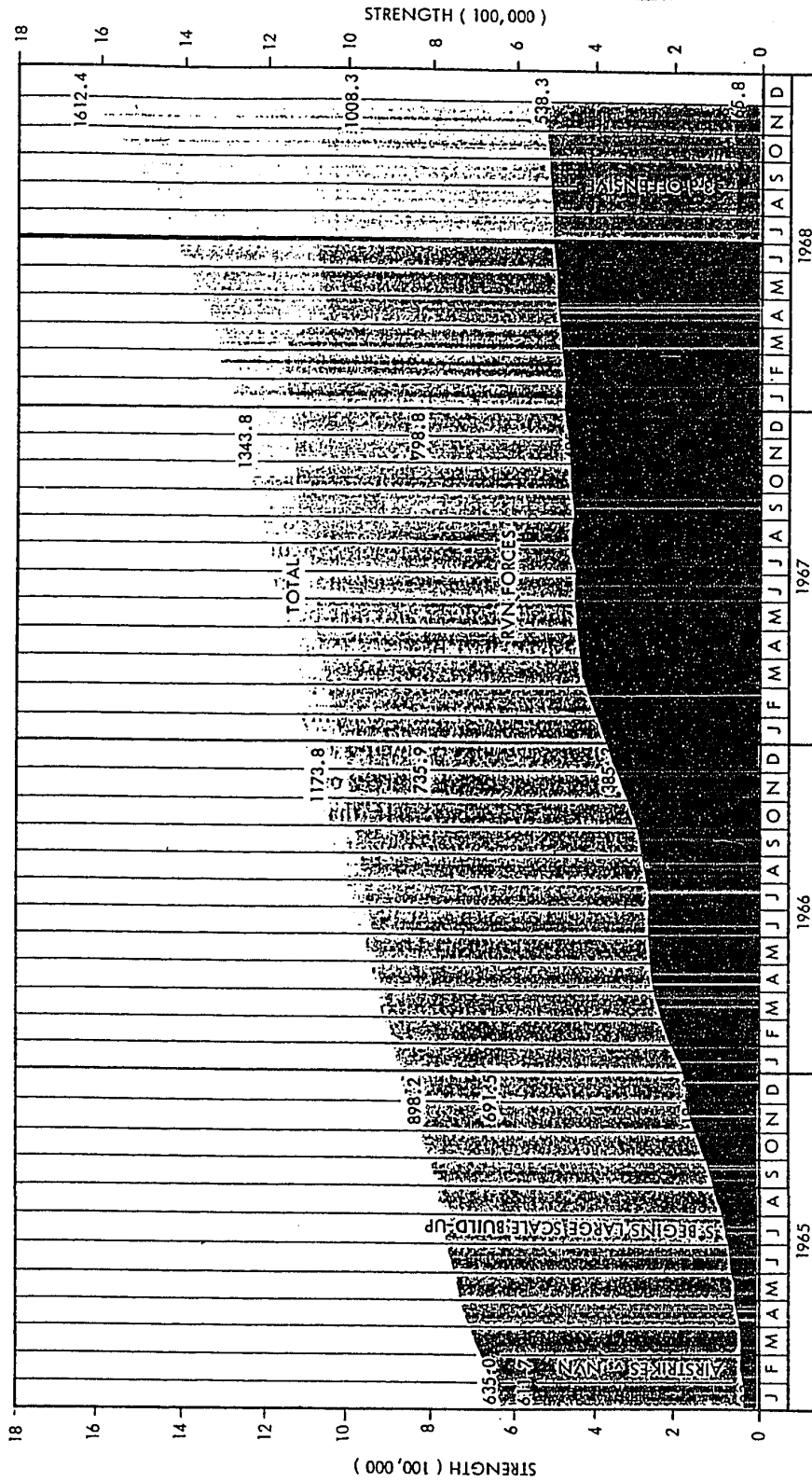
**TABLE FOUR**  
**SUPPORT FOR THE VIETNAM WAR BY AGE**  
 American Institute for Public Opinion, The Gallup Organization

Date	Under 30			AGE 30-49			Over 49		
	S	O	U	S	O	U	S	O	U
May, 1965	61	21	18	59	23	18	43	30	27
August, 1965	76	14	10	64	22	14	51	29	20
November, 1965	75	17	8	68	17	15	57	25	18
March, 1966	71	21	8	63	23	14	48	30	22
May, 1966	62	29	9	54	32	14	39	42	19
September, 1966	53	37	10	56	28	16	39	40	21
November, 1966	66	21	13	55	30	15	41	36	23
May, 1967	60	31	9	53	34	13	42	42	16
July, 1967	62	32	6	52	37	11	37	50	13
October, 1967	50	43	7	50	43	7	35	53	12
Early Feb., 1968	51	40	9	44	46	10	36	48	16
March, 1968	50	46	4	46	47	7	35	52	13
April, 1968	54	38	8	44	46	10	31	54	15
August, 1968	45	48	7	39	48	13	27	61	12
Early Oct., 1968	52	44	4	41	49	10	26	64	10
February, 1969	47	49	4	43	49	8	31	57	12
September, 1969	36	58	6	37	54	9	25	63	12
January, 1970	41	54	5	37	54	9	25	62	13
April, 1970	43	50	7	40	45	15	25	57	18
March, 1970	48	49	3	41	53	6	26	61	13
January, 1971	41	52	7	38	55	7	20	67	13
May, 1971	34	59	7	30	61	9	23	63	14

**Key:** S=Support, O=Opposed, U=Undecided

**Source:** John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), p. 275.

# VIETNAMESE AND ALLIED FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM



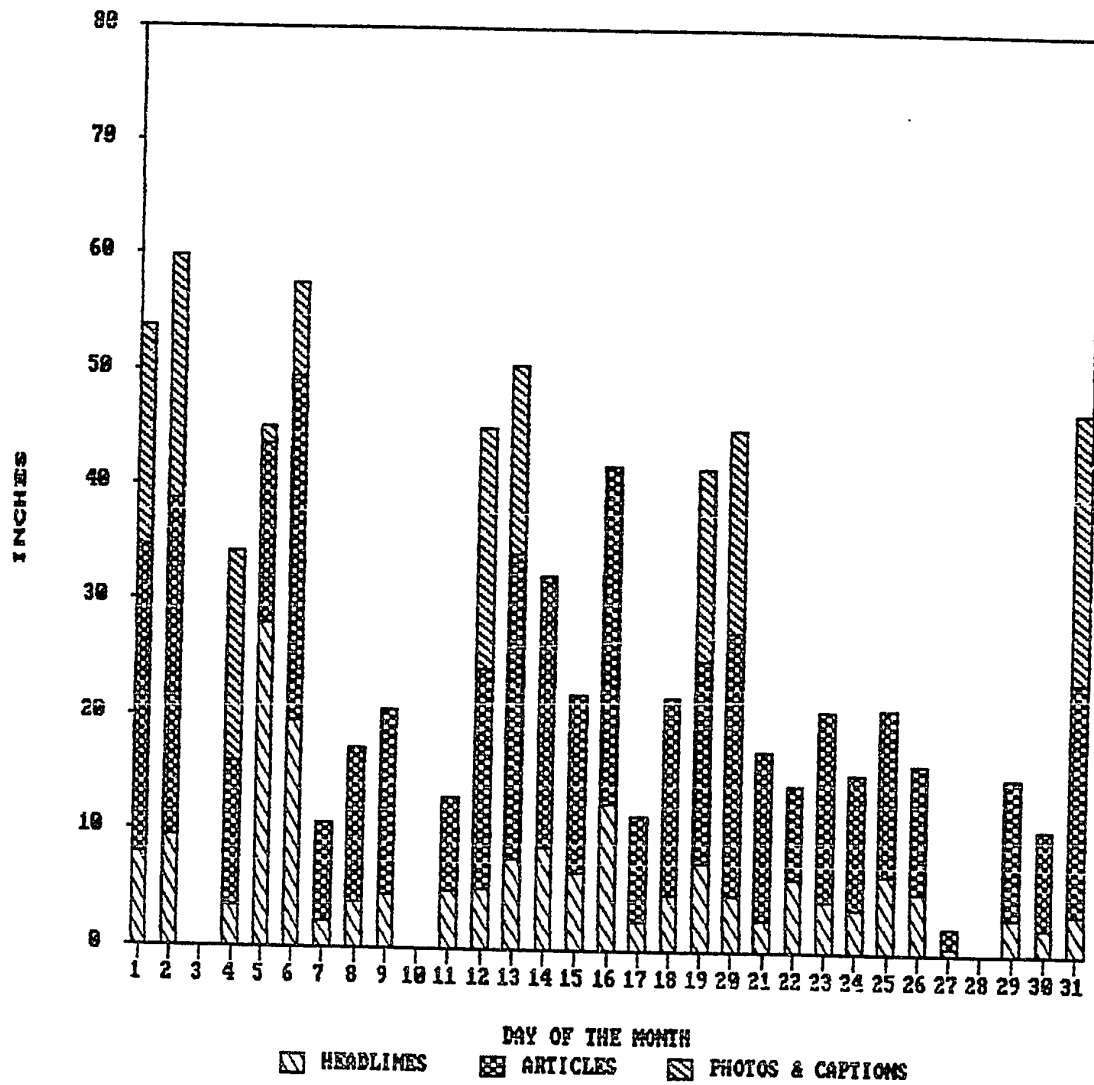
IN 1964 THERE WERE 23,300 U. S. MILITARY ADVISORS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Source: Admiral U.S. G. Sharp and General W.C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1968, 197.

# APPENDIX D

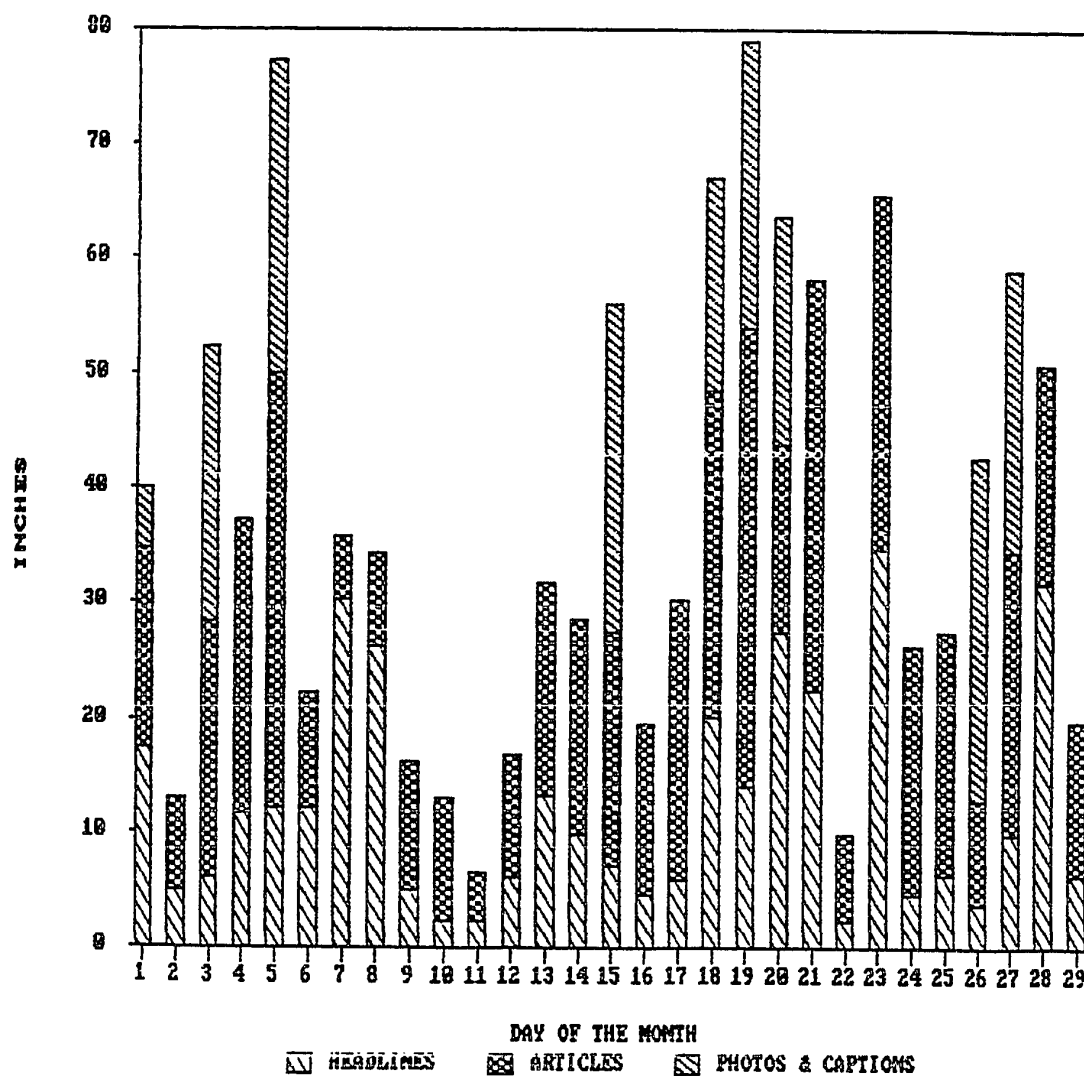
## SAN JOSE MERCURY

JANUARY 1968



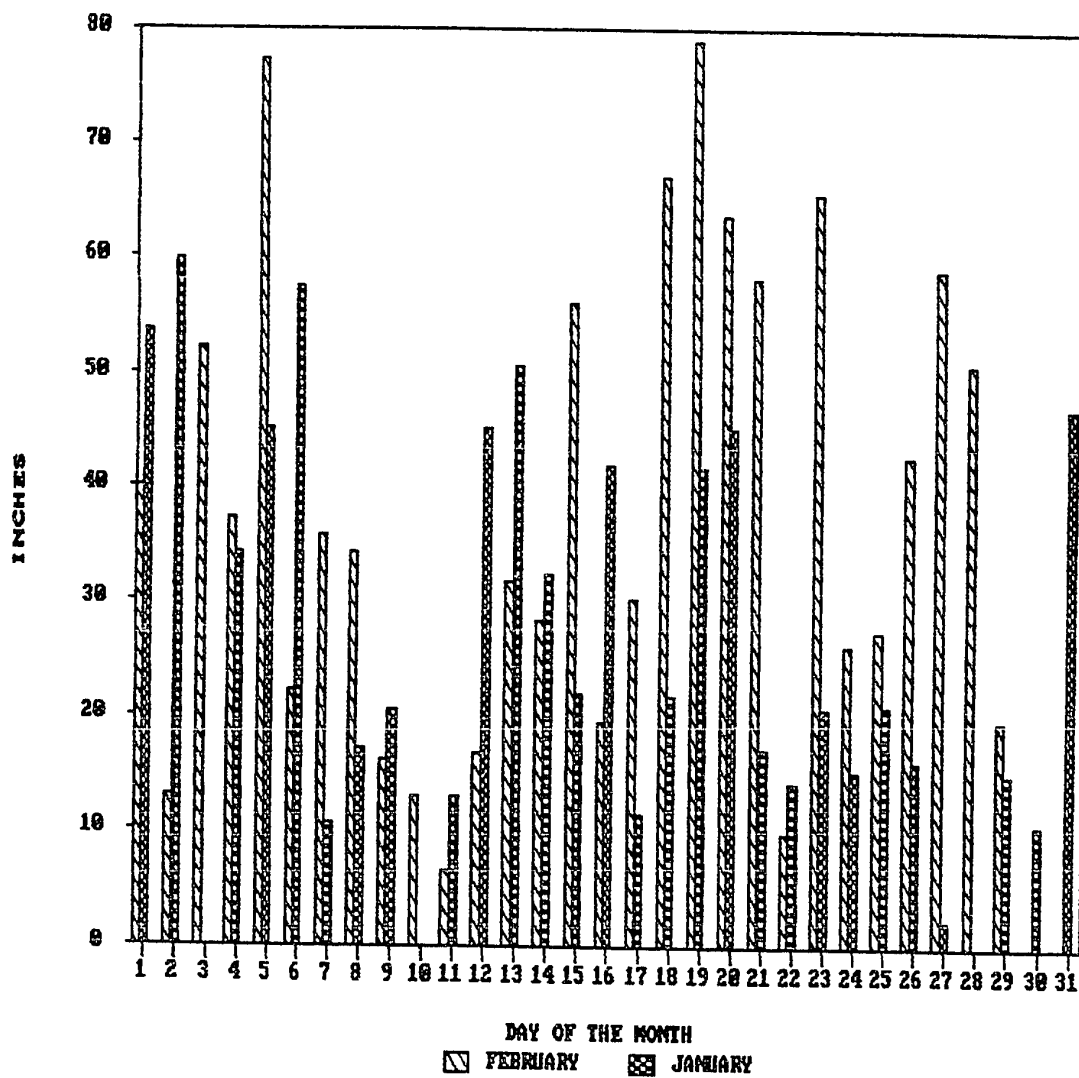
# SAN JOSE MERCURY

## FEBRUARY 1968



SAN JOSE MERCURY

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1968





## APPENDIX E

The following is a complete listing of references to the Vietnam war which appeared on the front pages of the San Jose Mercury and San Jose Mercury-News between the dates of 1 January 1968 and 29 February 1968 with a brief synopsis of each reference. The capital letters, underlining, and punctuation appear as they did in the newspaper.

### JANUARY

#### **Monday 1 January 1968**

Headline: U.S. Armor Ambushed

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI, New York Times) - Describes 32 "incidents" by Reds violating New Year cease-fire. Fourteen Americans were wounded. Personnel carriers attacked south of Saigon.

Headline: S.J. Deserter on TV

Comments: CBS. interviews San Jose native, Craig Anderson, who deserted navy to defect to the U.S.S.R.

Headline: Pope Sees Some Hope for Peace

Comments: Vatican City (UPI) - Pope Paul VI calls for peace in the New Year.

Photograph: Outlook Grim

Comments: Shows unidentified marine at Phu Long Village near Da Nang on sentry guard.

#### **Tuesday 2 January 1968**

Headline: 'Bloodiest Truce'

Sub-heading: Cong Attack Kills 26 GI's

Comments: Saigon (AP) - Viet Cong guerrillas attack U.S. during truce, kill 26. U.S. resumes bombing of North Vietnam.

Headline: L.B.J. Orders Investment Travel

Comments: Johnson City, TX (UPI, Washington Post, New York Times) - Presidential press conference in which President Johnson discusses various topics including advances toward peace in Vietnam.

Headline: End Raids, Then We'll Talk

Comments: Washington (Washington Post) - North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh says North Viet Nam is ready to begin peace talks when bombing raids cease.

Photograph: Body English

Comments: LBJ clenches his fist during press conference.

### **Wednesday 3 January 1968**

There were no Vietnam-related stories on the front page of the Mercury.

### **Thursday 4 January 1968**

Headline: Bowles Tapped For Duty

Sub-heading: Envoy Will Go To Cambodia

Comments: Washington (UPI) - U.S. Ambassador to India, Chester W. Bowles is sent by LBJ to Cambodia to discuss Cambodia's being used as a North Vietnamese sanctuary.

Headline: No VIP Treatment For Robb

Comments: Washington (Los Angeles Times) - LBJ's son-in-law, Capt. Charles S. Robb to receive equal treatment as those of equal rank as he is sent to duty in Vietnam.

Photograph: Commandant

Comments: Gen. Leonard F. Chapman, Jr. at first press conference after being named Commandant of the Marine Corps.

### **Friday 5 January 1968**

Headline: Rusk Cautious on 'Peace Bid

Comments: Large headline for two related Articles. (Earlier editions: "Dean Rusk Probes Hanoi's Peace Bid")

Headline: N. Viets Affirm Offer

Sub-heading: Clarification Via France

Comments: French authorities confirm January 4 report that North Vietnam was prepared to negotiate.

Headline: 'What Do They Mean?'  
 Sub-heading: Hints Truce Violations  
 Comments: Rusk skeptical about North Vietnamese offer.

Photograph: Probing  
 Comments: Secretary of State Dean Rusk at press conference.

### **Saturday 6 January 1968**

Headline: Peace Pressure Up  
 Comments: Washington (Washington Post UPI) - President Johnson stands pat despite other nations' indicating desire to see U.S. negotiate peace.

Headline: Soviets Get U.S. Apology 'Ship Bombed in Haiphong'  
 Comments: (AP) - U.S. apologizes for accidental bombing.

Headline: "Doctor Spock Indicted 'Incited Draft Evasions'"  
 Comments: (AP, Los Angeles Times, UPI) - Federal grand jury indicts "Baby Doctor" Benjamin Spock, Yale University's Rev. William Sloane Coffin, and three others for encouraging draft evasion.

Photographs: "The Rev. Coffin...Yale Chaplain" and "Benjamin Spock...Welcomes Jail"

### **Sunday 7 January 1968**

Headline: Peking Puts Heat on Hanoi  
 Sub-heading: Against N. Viet Peace Moves  
 Comments: Peking (UPI) - Communist China urges North Vietnam not to seek peace talks.

### **Monday 8 January 1968**

Headline: In Coordination  
 Sub-heading: Reds Launch 7 Big Attacks  
 Comments: Saigon (AP) - Brief report of increased enemy activity, including fighting near Saigon, throughout South Vietnam.

Headline: Ho is Dead, Paper Says In Saigon  
 Comments: Saigon (AP) - New Saigon newspaper Cong Chung erroneously reports the death of Ho Chi Minh. Report not taken seriously by rest of the world.

**Tuesday 9 January 1968**

Headline: "In the Name of God, Stop"

Comments: Saigon (New York Times, UPI) - Fighting is reported 19 miles from Saigon. Roman Catholic Bishops change their position, call for peace. One hundred peasants arrested in Saigon for protesting U.S. bombing and presence.

Photograph: Skipper Torpedoed

Sub-heading: The Navy's Revenge

Comments: Captain Richard Alexander pictured after being relieved of command of the U.S.S. New Jersey following his criticism of naval decisions.

**Wednesday 10 January 1968**

There were no Vietnam-related stories on the front page of the Mercury.

**Thursday 11 January 1968**

Headline: No 'Hot Pursuit'

Sub-heading: Cambodian Pact Made, Prince Says

Comments: Phnom Penh (UPI) - Prince Norodom Sihanouk announces that Cambodia will no longer be used as a haven for North Vietnam. U.S. agrees not to send troops in "hot pursuit" into Cambodia.

**Friday 12 January 1968**

Headline: Rusk Target of Mob

Sub-heading: Nob Hill Scene of Rampage

Sub-heading: Police Club Demonstrators

Comments: San Francisco (AP, UPI) - A crowd of anti-war demonstrators clash with police prior to Secretary of State Dean Rusk's address to the Commonwealth Club.

Headline: Over 'Neutral' Zone

Sub-heading: B52's Dodge Red Rockets

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - The North Vietnamese Army launches a rare rocket attack against American B52's.

Photograph: Clubbing Police

Comments: (UPI) - San Francisco police wield clubs on demonstrators outside Fairmont Hotel.

**Saturday 13 January 1968**

Headline: Success for U.S. Envoy

Sub-heading: A Border Deal With Cambodia

Comments: Phnom Penh (New York Times, Washington Post, UPI) - Prince Sihanouk's plan for Cambodian border discussed. Russia balks at proposal.

Headline: Stiffer Sentences, Too

Sub-heading: "78% More Convicted For Draft Evasion"

Comments: Washington (New York Times) - Deceptive headline for article chronicling prosecutions and convictions of draft evaders from 1965-1967.

Headline: Protester Sentenced to 6 Months

Comments: Former San Jose State student William T. Fisher is sentenced for failing to report for the draft.

Photograph: Painkiller

Comments: L/Cpl. W. L. Files gives candy to Vietnamese children.

**Sunday 14 January 1968**

Headline: Humphrey Defends President

Comments: Harry Farrell, Mercury-News political writer - Vice President Humphrey views Vietnam as alternative to "nuclear holocaust" of WW III.

Headline: GI Push Foe Near Saigon

Comments: Saigon (UPI, AP) - U.S. battles Communists near Saigon. U.S. air attack moved to Laos to counter increased truck traffic on Ho Chi Minh trail.

Headline: Reds Accused

Sub-heading: Tito Death Plot Foiled - Cambodia

Comments: Bangkok (UPI) - Cambodian Security foils assassination attempt on visiting Yugoslav President Tito by Chinese-backed Khmers.

Headline: The State Poll

Sub-heading: Nixon is Favored in State

Comments: Don Muchmore (Los Angeles Times, San Jose Mercury-News) - Nixon continues to lead state GOP presidential polls over Governor Nelson Rockefeller.

**Monday 15 January 1968**

Headline: State Meetings

Sub-heading: Demos Still Split; GOP Hails Unity

Comments: Two Related articles. Harry Farrell (Mercury Political Writer) reports from Fresno about the division among democrats regarding the war, while Lou Cannon (Mercury's Sacramento Bureau) writes that the Republican convention stood united behind Governor Ronald Reagan.

Headline: Take Ho's Word--Mansfield

Comments: Washington (UPI) - Senator Mike Mansfield urges LBJ to halt bombing as sign to begin peace talks.

Headline: Enemy Massing

Sub-heading: B52s, Cruiser Zero In on DMZ

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - In an attempt to curtail a Communist build-up for a major offensive, Air Force B52s used in massive attack near the demilitarized zone. Meanwhile, New Zealand troops involved in their first major skirmish of the war near Saigon.

NOTE: Green Bay's Super Bowl January 14 victory over Oakland went unmentioned on the front page. This is in sharp contrast to the Mercury's more recent front page coverage of major athletic events, wherein it is not unusual for large color photographs to appear prominently on the front page. This was particularly the case in the issues following each of the four San Francisco 49ers' Super Bowl victories during the 1980's.

**Tuesday 16 January 1968**

Headline: McCarthy Gets Big Welcome

Comments: Harry Farrell (Mercury political writer) Stanford - Presidential "peace candidate" (who is far behind LBJ in the polls) receives rousing reception at Stanford University.

Headline: THIS IS OUR COUNTRY

Sub-heading: South Viet President Warns U.S. Against Deal With Reds

Comments: Saigon (Washington Post, New York Times, UPI) - South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu admonishes the U.S. not to make any deals with North Vietnam without clearing them with him.

Headline: 2,000 SOLDIERS MISSING

Sub-heading: North Viet Troops, Jets Rout Royal Laos Army

Comments: Vientiane, Laos (New York Times, AP) - Laotian sources confirmed the fall of the fortress town of Nambac to Communist forces.

### **Wednesday 17 January 1968**

Headline: 5,084 IN TWO WEEKS

Sub-heading: Red Death Toll May Be Viet Key

Comments: Saigon (AP) - South Vietnamese government sources cite high Communist body counts as rationale for reverting to ambush tactics.

### **Thursday 18 January 1968**

Headline: Johnson On State Of Union

Sub-heading: Notes Nation Is 'Restless'

Comments: Washington (Los Angeles Times) - Little hope for a quick peace was among the many topics discussed.

Headline: GUERRILLA GUNFIGHT

Sub-heading: U.S. Troops Bracket Cong in Jungle War

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - American successes against Viet Cong in northern Quang Ngai province and North Vietnamese near demilitarized zone. Included in the article were body counts.

### **Friday 19 January 1968**

Headline: MARINE VICTORY

Sub-heading: 162 Reds Die in Viet Clash

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI, Washington Post) - U.S. marines rout strong Communist force south of the demilitarized zone.

Headline: WITH ANTI-WAR OUTBURST

Sub-heading: Eartha Kitt Leaves Lady Bird In Tears

Comments: Washington (Washington Post, UPI) - Popular singer Kitt blasts Vietnam war at White House luncheon. Other guests speak in support of the war.

Photograph: TALK BEFORE THE STORM

Comments: First Lady Lady Bird Johnson pictured chatting with Eartha Kitt prior to luncheon.

**Saturday 20 January 1968**

Headline: WHITE HOUSE AFFAIR

Sub-heading: Eartha 'Said What Was In My Heart'

Comments: Los Angeles (Los Angeles Times) - Eartha Kitt defends outburst at White House luncheon.

Headline: Defense Chief Named

Sub-heading: McNamara's Successor

Comments: Washington (AP) - Clark Clifford replaces Robert McNamara as secretary of defense. Clifford avoids answering questions about Vietnam policy.

Photograph: Appointee

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - Clifford pictured conferring with President Johnson.

**Sunday 21 January 1968**

Headline: U.S. Installing Secret 'Barrier' In Laos

Comments: Washington (Washington Post) - Describes elaborate \$750 million electric and mechanical system which would detect movements along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos.

Headline: Hanoi Says U.S. 'Insolent'

Sub-heading: Peace Bid Is Spurned

Comments: Tokyo (AP) - Hanoi rejects President Johnson's San Antonio proposal to cease the bombing of Hanoi if peace talks would follow promptly calling such a proposal a "trick."

Headline: "240 Reds Killed By Marines"

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - Marines backed with B52 support rout Communists in a series of skirmishes on infiltration routes along the Ho Chi Minh trail near the demilitarized zone.

**Monday 22 January 1968**

Headline: POURING IN FROM LAOS

Sub-heading: Red Forces Hurl Attack Along 'McNamara Wall'

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops increase activity along the demilitarized zone. Meanwhile, the South Vietnamese government reduces upcoming 48-hour truce to 36 hours.



**Tuesday 23 January 1968**

Headline: INTO CAMBODIA

Sub-heading: U.S. Admits GI Crossing

Comments: Washington (AP) - The State Department admits that a U.S.-Vietnamese patrol unknowingly entered 75 yards into Cambodian territory "during the heat of battle."

Headline: "Small U.S. Unit Quits Khe Sanh"

Comments: Saigon (AP) - While fighting continued at the military outposts nearby, the city of Khe Sanh is abandoned by the small bands of U.S. Marines and the South Vietnamese militia defending it.

**Wednesday 24 January 1968**

Headline: DEEPENING DISBELIEF

Sub-heading: GOP Attacks LBJ Policies At Home and on War Front

Comments: Washington (UPI) - Republican Senators Thomas Kuchel of California and John Tower of Texas join Congressman Gerald R. Ford of Michigan in rebuffing points made President Johnson during State of the Union Address delivered a week earlier. In their rebuttal the Republicans indicate the president waffled on too many points concerning American intentions in the war effort. (Another future president, Representative George Bush of Texas, uses forum to lambaste Johnson's proposed 10% income tax boost and restrictions on foreign travel and investment, referring to the scheme as a "bankrupt policy.")

Banner: U.S. Speeding Task Force To No. Korea

Headline: Pueblo, 83 Yanks Captured

Sub-heading: Reds Refuse Ship's Return

Comments: Washington (Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, UPI) - The U.S.S. Pueblo, an American naval intelligence vessel, captured by Communists off the coast of North Korea creating an embarrassing international incident for the Americans.

While not directly linked with the war in Vietnam, the headline story of the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo by North Korean Communists went far to accelerate questioning of American policy in Asia, and created a psychological environment in the United States allowing the Tet Offensive, which would follow a few days later, an even greater impact that it would otherwise have had.

**Thursday 25 January 1968**

Headline: N. Viets' Big Guns Rip Base

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - The North Vietnamese siege on the American Marine base at Khe Sanh took on a new dimension as the Communist attack included tanks artillery for the first time. Meanwhile, intelligence reports indicate Communists mounting a major push.

Headline: STATE POLL LBJ

Sub-heading: Viet Approval Increasing

Comments: Don Muchmore (Los Angeles Times, San Jose Mercury) A scientifically selected sampling of people in the state shows increasing support for the president's war policy. The same poll, however, indicates some disagreement as to what that policy is.

**Friday 26 January 1968**

Headline: MARINES AMBUSHED

Sub-heading: Red Troops Assault U.S. Divisional HQs

Comments: Saigon (AP) - Hours before the New Year cease-fire was to begin, Communist forces attack U.S. marine headquarters at Da Nang and an airfield and headquarters at Khe Sanh. Marines repel attacks, but not without casualties. Meanwhile, two marines captured by the Viet Cong escape and return to safety.

**Saturday 27 January 1968**

Headline: Reds to Free 3 U.S. Pilots

Comments: Tokyo (AP) - North Vietnam announces the release three American pilots. Details were not given.

(This brief story of less than two column inches appeared only at the bottom of the front page of the final edition. Most of the front page was dominated by the unfolding incident involving the U.S.S. Pueblo.)

**Sunday 28 January 1968**

There were no Vietnam-related stories on the front page of the Mercury-News.

**Monday 29 January 1968**

Headline: FOR RELEASE

Sub-heading: Hanoi Names 3 U.S. Fliers

Comments: Tokyo (UPI) - In a brief report Radio Hanoi gives the names of the three American pilots to be released. No further details about the release are given.

**Tuesday 30 January 1968**

Headline: Huge Red Attack On Yanks

Sub-heading: Allies Call Off Lunar Truce

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - The beginning of the Tet Offensive reported with the Communists attacking Da Nang and Nha Trang. The story reports that the New Year truce has been officially canceled in fear of further Communist aggression.

This important story captured less than 11 total column inches of the front page of the final edition, however the four-star edition featured a much larger headline.

Headline: Combat Rifle Powder Banned

Comments: Washington (AP) - Secretary of Defense McNamara announces discontinuation of production of the 5.56mm cartridge used in the controversial M16 rifle as the powder used in the cartridges led to safety problems with the weapon.

**Wednesday 31 January 1968**

Headline: GIs Kill Embassy Raiders

Sub-heading: Entire Suicide Squad Killed

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - Newspaper readers spared the drama of the Viet Cong assault on the United States Embassy in Saigon as the intruders were all dead well before press time. The Embassy assault is only aspect of the Tet offensive to be discussed, although allusions are made to some other sites in and around Saigon being struck.

(While the five-star final featured the banner FEAR 16 DEAD IN SNOW, earlier editions ran the headline "Cong Seize U.S. Embassy" in one-inch type across the page under the masthead.)

Headline: LBJ Asks More Aid For Vets

Comments: Washington (UPI) - President Johnson asks congress to approve expanded benefits package for the nation's veterans, particularly Vietnam veterans.

Photograph: Cover

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - Two U.S. soldiers are shown hiding behind a tree near the embassy in Saigon.

(The four-star edition featured a photograph of the embassy compound with a helicopter lighting on the roof of the embassy itself.)

## FEBRUARY

**Thursday 1 February 1968**

Headline: CONG ROVING SAIGON

Comments: This headline in 1-1/2 inch letters under the masthead of the final edition calls attention to two Vietnam-related stories.

Headline: TO MEET CRISIS

Sub-heading: White House Hints Call-up

Comments: Washington (New York Times, AP) - The White House responds to both the "Red terror attacks" in Vietnam and the ongoing ordeal with North Korea and the Pueblo with a measure allowing the calling up of certain specialized reservists.

Headline: Allies Bombing Cholon

Sub-heading: Red Assault Losses 5,000

Comments: Saigon (New York Times, UPI) - Continued Viet Cong resistance makes it necessary for the allies to initiate bombing in neighborhoods in Saigon.

Map: Targets

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - Small map of Vietnam showing cities hit by recent offensive. Only eight cities are listed on the map, including one north of the demilitarized zone.

**Friday 2 February 1968**

Headline: 10,953 CONG KILLED

Sub-heading: Warplanes Divebomb Ancient Hue

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - Allied focus from the offensive switched from Saigon to Hue as the allies begin a counter-attack on the ancient imperial capital. Body counts provided in the article purport to show that the offensive was extremely costly for the Communists at best, an unmitigated disaster at worst.

NOTE: Page five of this edition features large photographs of some of the horrors of recent events in Vietnam. Included is a series of three, the middle of which would become one of the most famous of the war. It shows South Vietnamese national police chief Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan summarily dispatching an unidentified Viet Cong officer with a single pistol shot to the head. The headline for this triptych read, "Saigon Justice: Swift, Accurate, Deadly," while

the caption read in part, "Justice in Saigon, beleaguered by bands of roving Viet Cong, is not tempered with mercy - to say the least. In this sequence, a Viet Cong officer gets his come-uppance in the city street...."

### **Saturday 3 February 1968**

Headline: Johnson: Viet Raid Failure

Sub-heading: Calm at News Conference

Comments: Washington (Washington Post) - President Johnson assures media that militarily, the Viet Cong attacks in South Vietnam were "a complete failure," adding he saw no psychological gain for the Cong, either. The president, however, reserves making broader assessments on the progress of the war pending the outcome of the standoff at Khe Sanh.

(While the five-star edition ran this story under the unrelated banner, "Dangerous Gas NEW BAY SMOG PERIL", earlier editions afforded it a headline in one-inch letters under the masthead which read, "LBJ Scoffs At Viet Raids".)

Headline: ENEMY STILL HOLDS MANY CITIES

Sub-heading: Fresh Fighting Flares In Saigon And Suburbs

Comments: Saigon (New York Times) - Over a dozen cities throughout South Vietnam where fighting was taking place or the Communists had taken control mentioned in this article. Body count shows Communist casualties continuing to mount at an enormous rate.

Headline: Missionaries Massacred

Comments: (Unattributed) - Six missionaries, three men and three women killed in a village in the Vietnamese highlands during a guerrilla attack.

Photograph: Painful Retreat

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - A wounded U.S. marine seeks cover after encountering stiff Communist resistance entering Hue.

### **Sunday 4 February 1968**

Headline: Door-To-Door Battles In Viet

Sub-heading: 14,997 Enemy Killed

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - Soaring body count forces allies to take the war to the streets. The U.S. Command reports that Saigon appears to again be safe.

Headline: INGRAINED VIOLENCE

Sub-heading: Viet Bitterness Goes On, On...On

Comments: Saigon (AP) - Instances of individual brutality analyzed.

### **Monday 5 February 1968**

Headline: Reds Hit Besieged Base

Sub-heading: Marines Repel Assault

Sub-heading: May Be Start Of 'Big Push'

Comments: Saigon (UPI, AP) - North Vietnamese step up artillery strikes at Khe Sanh. Marines defenses preparing for massive attack.

Headline: FATAL TREACHERY

Sub-heading: U.S. Employees Helped Cong Invade Embassy

Comments: Saigon (New York Times) - "Informed sources" indicate Viet Cong who attacked the United States Embassy in Saigon aided by two Vietnamese drivers employed by the embassy. The drivers allegedly used their identification cards to gain access to the compound where they shot two American M.P.s just prior to the attack. No comment on the report from embassy officials.

Headline: Johnson Wants It in Writing

Comments: New York (AP) - This 1-1/2 inch story in the lower right hand corner of the page gives two important insights into the president's thinking. First, it reports that the president has instructed each member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assure him, in writing, that Khe Sanh can be defended. Second, in referring to the ongoing siege, the president declared that he didn't "want any damned Dien Bien Phu."

Headline: Door Is Closed On Peace Try

Comments: Washington (New York Times, Washington Post) - Secretary of State Rusk tells national television audience that secret groundwork had been laid for the beginning of peace talks and bombing in Hanoi and Haiphong had been curtailed on January 19. Rusk adds the recent Communist uprising demonstrates Hanoi not earnest in continuing peace negotiations.

Headline: U.S. Captain in Vietnam Gets Life

Comments: Saigon (AP) - United States Army Captain John J. McCarthy, Jr., a member of the Green Berets, sentenced to life imprisonment by seven-officer court-martial for killing a Vietnamese national.

Headline: Vietnam Vote Asked in L.A.

Comments: Los Angeles (UPI) - Petitions being circulated in the Los Angeles area to put a Vietnam peace initiative on the ballot.

**Tuesday 6 February 1968**

Headline: SAIGON REDS BOMBED

Comments: Banner in 1-1/2 letters across the top of the final edition.

Headline: Police Station Seized

Sub-heading: U.S. Advisors Freed in Hue

Comments: Saigon (New York Times, UPI) - Despite artillery shelling by South Vietnam, Viet Cong guerrillas still active in parts of Saigon. Meanwhile, the "big push" expected at Khe Sanh has yet to materialize.

**Wednesday 7 February 1968**

Headline: GREEN BERETS TARGET OF RED TANK ATTACK

Comments: Banner 3-1/2 inches high across the top of the final edition. In earlier editions, the headline "Red Tanks Attack Berets" appeared in one-inch letters below the masthead.

Headline: Enemy's 1st Use Of Armor

Sub-heading: Marines Raise Flag at Hue

Comments: Saigon (AP, New York Times, Los Angeles Times) - North Vietnamese infantry use armored cars to undertake assault on the special forces camp at Lang Vei, near the Laotian border and Khe Sanh. In Hue, allied forces continue to push back the Communists, taking over what had been a North Vietnamese command post. The Citadel, however, remains in enemy hands.

**Thursday 8 February 1968**

Headline: Green Beret Camp Falls

Sub-heading: REDS SLAM KHE SANH

Comments: Banner covering the top three inches of the final edition.

Headline: Lang Vei Overrun By Tanks

Sub-heading: 392 Defenders Dead, Missing

Comments: Saigon (AP) - In a follow-up to the Lang Vei story, North Vietnamese troops use Soviet made tanks to successfully overtake the camp. Speculation is that the long awaited "big push" finally beginning. Elsewhere, incidents of street fighting in Saigon and allied troops continue to make progress in Hue.



**Friday 9 February 1968**

Headline: LANG VEI REACTION

Sub-heading: Do-Or-Die Orders For Khe Sanh

Comments: Saigon (New York Times, AP, UPI) - Surprising fall of Lang Vei prompts high military officials to prepare to defend Khe Sanh "at all costs." In Hue, two battalions of reinforcements arrive to assist the Communists in their defense of the city.

**Saturday 10 February 1968**

Headline: GIs Join Saigon Battle

Sub-heading: Tired of Slow Viet Progress

Comments: Saigon (Unattributed) - In a show of dissatisfaction with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, United States Army personnel from the 25th Infantry Division have been dispatched to help rid Saigon of Viet Cong. The 25th score some impressive body counts in early engagements. Meanwhile in Hue, Communists defenders continue to retreat as allied forces recapture several important buildings.

**Sunday 11 February 1968**

Headline: RUSK WARNS OF CLIMAX

Sub-heading: Viet Cong Invade Town Behind 'Human Shields'

Comments: Saigon (UPI, AP) - Viet Cong troops use a shield of women and children to invade Mekong delta town of Bac Lieu where they burn over 1,000 homes. Few new developments in Hue and Khe Sanh.

NOTES: Two others interesting features in this issue were: 1) A photograph on the front page captioned "On Guard" shows an armed American soldier and four United Nations tanks. This significance of the photograph is that it was taken in Korea, not Vietnam. A Gallup poll (which is described in detail on page two) shows that 45% of Americans thought that war with North Korea was likely to occur. 2) A page two article entitled "Hanoi Calls Khe Sanh A 'Dien Bien Phu.'" The article, dateline Hanoi, North Vietnam (Agence France-Presse) cites the North Vietnamese Communist Party newspaper, Nhan Dan likening Khe Sanh to the decisive 1954 battle. Although the connection had been made previously in the west, this was the first time the Communists officially made the connection.

**Monday 12 February 1968**

Headline: 300 IN ATROCITY

Sub-heading: Civilians Executed By Cong

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - First report of mass executions committed by the Communists clinging to control of Hue.

**Tuesday 13 February 1968**

Headline: "HO, ARE YOU THERE?"

Comments: Banner in 1-1/2 inch letters across top of the front page of the final edition. Earlier editions feature the headline "Peace Offer Stands - LBJ" in one inch letters.

Headline: Want Answer On Our Peace Offer - LBJ

Comments: Washington (UPI, Los Angeles Times) - President Johnson reaffirms San Antonio proposal, but is running out of patience.

Headline: Key Allied Base Hit By Rockets

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - Viet Cong forces launch their fifth rocket attack on the United States rocket base at Bien Hoa resulting in slight damage. At Khe Sanh, the stand-off continued amid occasional fighting. Meanwhile, allied forces enter the Citadel in Hue.

**Wednesday 14 February 1968**

Headline: 10,500 ON WAY

Sub-heading: More GIs Speed To Viet War

Comments: Washington (AP, UPI) - The pentagon announces its acceding to General Westmoreland's request for 10,500 more troops. This influx would result in a reassessment of the 525,000 troop ceiling authorized by the president.

Headline: Marines Pinned At Hue

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - Marines attempting to retake the Citadel encounter heavy counter-fire.

Headline: GALLUP POLL

Sub-heading: Viet Cong Attacks Hurt LBJ's Ratings

Comments: Princeton N.J. (George Gallup, American Institute of Public Opinion) - The most recent Gallup Poll shows a loss of four percent (from 39% to 35%) in public approval of his handling of the war. Of those polled, 61% said they favored increased military efforts (up from 56% in January and 52% in December, 1967) while the percentage of those wishing to reduce the effort fell from 28% in January to 23% (it had been 35% in December).

Headline: SECRET PARIS TALKS

Sub-heading: Thant Meets Hanoi Aide

Comments: Paris (New York Times, Los Angeles Times) - United Nations Secretary General U Thant makes a surprise visit to Paris where he meets with French and North Vietnamese officials in effort to organize further peace talks.

Headline: Citadel Bombed In Hue

Sub-heading: U.S. Jets Also Hit Near Hanoi

Comments: Saigon (New York Times, AP, UPI) - United States forces begin bombardment of Citadel by land and sea as effort to drive the Viet Cong from Hue continues.

Headline: No A-Arms 'Needed At Khe Sanh'

Comments: Washington (UPI) - Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle C. Wheeler said it would not be necessary to employ nuclear weapons in the defense of Khe Sanh.

Photograph: War-Bound

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - Combat-ready marines are pictured as they board a plane at Camp Pendleton.

### **Friday 16 February 1968**

Headline: STILL HOLD CITADEL

Sub-heading: N. Viet Troops March On Hue

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - United States Marines make advancements in the Citadel as North Vietnamese reinforcements move toward the city. The 416 Americans killed over the previous seven days sets a new weekly high.

Headline: Thant Trip Raises No New Hope

Comments: United Nations (New York Times) - United Nations Secretary General Thant's Paris talks with the North Vietnamese yielded no new interest in the Communists furthering peace negotiations.

### **Saturday 17 February 1968**

Headline: Hints More Troops

Comments: Washington (Los Angeles Times) - President Johnson indicates he might acquiesce to General Westmoreland's request to increase troop ceiling of 525,000 in Vietnam. The president takes the opportunity to laud the performance of General Westmoreland. (The four-star edition drew attention to this article by adding a headline in one inch letters under the masthead which read, "LBJ Defends Gen. 'Westy'".)

Headline: MANY ABOLISHED

Sub-heading: Stiffer Draft Deferments

Comments: Washington (UPI, AP) - The Selective Service abolishes draft deferments for up to 800,000 men, making them eligible for the draft.

Headline: USE CAPTURED TANKS

Sub-heading: Reds Making Last Stand In Hue Fort

Comments: Hue (AP, UPI, New York Times) - Marines joined by elite South Vietnamese Black Panther Regiment force the Communists "backs to the wall" in Hue. At Khe Sanh, North Vietnamese army divisions mass north of the base.

### **Sunday 18 February 1968**

Headline: AIR BASE HIT

Sub-heading: Reds Launch 2nd Assault In 20 Towns

Comments: Saigon (UPI, AP) - Communist forces launch second major offensive of the year, attacking more than 20 cities. The coastal city of Pan Thiet hardest hit in the offensive. Communists also hit targets in the Highlands and Saigon. In Hue, Communists manage to cling to a small position within the Citadel.

Headline: S.J. Man Missing In Hue; Safe

Comments: (Unattributed) - University of Hue English teacher Stephen C. Erhart, missing since January 31, found.

Headline: President in Surprise Trip To California Base

Sub-heading: El Toro Marine Pep Talk

Comments: El Toro Marine Air Station (Helen Thomas, UPI) - President Johnson flies to California to rally paratroopers and marines being sent to Vietnam.

Photograph: Concerned Chief

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - President Johnson has solemn expression as he reviews troops in North Carolina. The president later flew to California.

Headline: THE GALLUP POLL LBJ's Popularity In Sharp Decline

Comments: Princeton, N.J. (George Gallup, American Institute of Public Opinion) - Pollster George Gallup cites the "recent Viet Cong uprising" as cause for decline in approval for President Johnson's handling of his office. The poll indicates 41% of those polled approve and 47% disapprove of the way Johnson is handling his job. In January, the numbers had been 48% and 39%, respectively. No opinion dropped from 13% to 12%.

job. In January, the numbers had been 48% and 39%, respectively. No opinion dropped from 13% to 12%.

### **Monday 19 February 1968**

Headline: SURPRISE BRIEFING

Sub-heading: Johnson Talks, Golfs With Ike

Comments: Palm Desert (New York Times, UPI) - President Johnson meets with former President Eisenhower to discuss the war.

Headline: Cong Rocket Hits Airport, GIs Victims

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - Ton Son Nhut airport in Saigon hit by a rocket which kills one and wounds 21 Americans. The Communists also strike with mortar attacks at several sites in Saigon and throughout the country.

Photograph: A Quick 18

Comments: (UPI Telephoto) - President Johnson walks on the 18th green of a Palm Springs golf course with former President Eisenhower.

Headline: Anti-War Protest In Berlin

Comments: Berlin (AP, UPI) - Anti-war sentiment abroad reported with demonstrations in West Berlin and Rome.

### **Tuesday 20 February 1968**

Headline: Do-Or-Die Red Attack

Sub-heading: MARINES DRIVEN BACK

Comments: Three inch Banner at top of front page of final edition. Earlier editions carried a 2-3/4 inch headline under the masthead which read, "Do-Or-Die Reds Repulse Marines."

Headline: Yanks Short Of Men

Sub-heading: Battle for Hue In 21st Day

Comments: Hue (New York Times) - Communist forces use machine guns, snipers, anti-tank guns, and mortars to turn back allied push to liberate Hue.

Photograph: Battle Zone

Comments: Marines, one of whom has been hit, search for snipers in Hue.

Headline: Marines Angry, Bitter

Comments: Hue (Lee Lescaze, Washington Post) - American marines frustrated by the tenacity and intelligence of the Communists remaining in Hue.

Headline: Gen. Pershing's Grandson Killed

Comments: New York (New York Times) - Second Lieutenant Richard W. Pershing, grandson of the former General of the Armies John J. Pershing, among those killed in action in Vietnam during last week's fighting

### Wednesday 21 February 1968

Headline: NEW SAIGON ATTACK

Comments: One-and-one-half inch banner at the top of front page of the final edition. Earlier editions carried the smaller headline, "Saigon Fears New Assault" in one-inch type under the masthead.

Headline: GI's Fight Cong In Suburbs

Sub-heading: Marines Still Stymied at Hue

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - American infantrymen rout band of Viet Cong in a northeastern suburb of Saigon. In Hue, about 400 Communist troops continue to hold off allied forces.

Headline: McNAMARA TESTIFIES

Sub-heading: Tonkin Gulf Action Probed

Comments: Washington (AP) - A committee headed by Senator J. W. Fulbright (Democrat from Arkansas) investigates the nature of the Gulf of Tonkin incident which led to escalation of American involvement in the war in 1964. Robert McNamara testifies the attacks on the destroyers U.S.S. Turner Joy and U.S.S. Maddox were unprovoked.

Headline: Thant, LBJ Set To Talk

Sub-heading: Bombing Halt Heads Agenda

Comments: United Nations (AP) -United Nations Secretary General Thant said to be ready to report to President Johnson Hanoi willing to discuss peace if the United States would cease the bombing of Hanoi.

Headline: DOMESTIC SERVICE-CUT

Sub-heading: Airlines Diverted To Vietnam Airlift

Comments: San Francisco International Airport (Bob Lindsey, Mercury Staff Writer) - The federal government requisitions more than 20 commercial jet airliners to aid in the bolstering of numbers of troops in Vietnam. The requisitioning results in the reduction or cancellation of service between San Francisco and Honolulu and San Francisco and east coast destinations.

**Thursday 22 February 1968**

Headline: Battles Circle Saigon

Sub-heading: Capital Girds For Attacks

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - Another Communist offensive feared as fighting heats up in three sites near Saigon. In one engagement, American and Communists engage in heavy fighting for several hours. In Hue, the allies still unable to rouse the remaining Viet Cong from their hideouts.

Headline: LBJ-Thant Talks Show No Progress

Comments: Washington (AP) - United Nations Secretary General Thant meets with President Johnson for an hour in talks which yield little progress toward peace.

Headline: FULLBRIGHT CHARGE:

Sub-heading: 'Congress Misled On Tonkin Gulf'

Comments: Washington (AP) - Senator Fullbright debunks the testimony of Robert McNamara during committee hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Fullbright charged that Congress was misled in order to increase support for the massive troop build-up which followed.

**Friday 23 February 1968**

Headline: Wheeler Surveying Needs

Sub-heading: 50,000 CALL-UP DUE

Comments: Three inch banner at top of front page of final edition. Earlier editions carried a headline in one inch type under the masthead which read, "Joint Chiefs Want Call-Up of 50,000."

Headline: 130,000 On Alert For Viet

Sub-heading: LBJ Pledges More Troops

Comments: Washington (AP, New York Times) - The Joint Chiefs of Staff announce plan calling for the call-up of 50,000 additional army national guardsmen and marine corps reservists to compensate for the overall troop depletion around the world caused by Vietnam war.

Headline: Marines Capture Hue Wall

Sub-heading: Spearheaded By Napalm

Comments: Hue (UPI, AP, New York Times) - Marines in Hue finally make substantial progress toward wiping out the last of the resistance in the Citadel. Meanwhile, at Khe Sanh, a North Vietnamese attack on the base is turned back; however, substantial Communist presence precludes reinforcement or withdrawal of the camp. First Air Cavalry troops claim to have severed vital Communist supply lines to Hue

and that despite being hit by bombs, Radio Hanoi continued to broadcast.

Headline: WORST OF WAR

Sub-heading: 543 Yanks Killed In One Week

Comments: Saigon (Unattributed) - The United States command reports a record 543 deaths in the previous week of fighting, bringing the three-week total to 1,539, with a total of 18,239 for the war. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had suffered 37,515 deaths in the three weeks following the beginning of the Tet offensive.

Photograph: Reinforcements

Comments: (Unattributed) - Three marines pictured airlifting emergency supplies to the camp at Khe Sanh.

Headline: THE TONKIN AFFAIR

Sub-heading: Secret Navy Code Supports Morse

Comments: Washington (UPI) - Senator Wayne Morse's contention that the destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy were spy ships which provoked an attack supported by secret navy message the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported.

## **Saturday 24 February 1968**

Headline: Draft Call Hiked To 48,000

Sub-heading: 2nd Highest Of Viet War

Comments: Washington (New York Times) - The Defense Department announces 48,000 men would be drafted in April.

Headline: Saigon Air Base Hit Again

Sub-heading: 4 Yanks Die, 31 Injured

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - Tan Son Nhut airport hit again by Viet Cong rockets. In other developments, allied forces finally took control of the Citadel in Hue and marines at Khe Sanh withstand a heavy rocket and artillery barrage. This article also had a headline in one inch type under the masthead which read "Saigon Air Base Hit Again."

## **Sunday 25 February 1968**

Headline: WHARVES POUNDED

Sub-heading: U.S. Ends Hanoi Bombing Phase

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - Americans conclude a phase of North Vietnamese bombing with attack on a port facility near downtown Hanoi. Elsewhere, Communists blew up two bridges into Saigon and launch a rocket attack against the American air base at Da Nang. Viet Cong flag was removed from the Citadel in Hue.



Headline: IN SENATE QUESTIONING OF McNAMARA

Sub-heading: Tonkin Report Discrepancy Disclosed

Comments: Washington (The Washington Post) - The Senate Foreign Relations Committee releases details from an 4 August 1964 cable contradicting testimony given by Secretary of State McNamara.

### **Monday 26 February 1968**

Headline: Fierce 'Wagon Train' Fight: Cong Repulsed

Comments: Saigon (AP, UPI) - United States infantrymen use a circle of armored vehicles to withstand a Viet Cong guerrilla attack south of Saigon. In Hue, mop up activities underway.

Photograph: Flag-Raising

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - The flag of the Republic of South Vietnam raised over Citadel in Hue.

### **Tuesday 27 February 1968**

Headline: 'BERET' VICTORY Red Tanks Ambushed

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - Special forces troops rout convoy of three North Vietnamese tanks near the Cambodian border.

Headline: North Viets Grab Laos Villages

Comments: Vientiane, Laos (UPI) - North Vietnamese troops seize eight Laotian border villages, much to the consternation of the governments of Thailand and Laos.

Photograph: GOODBYE KHE SANH

Comments: (AP Wirephoto) - A wounded marine airlifted out of the besieged base at Khe Sanh.

Headline: TO CONFUSE ENEMY

Sub-heading: Censorship Decree By U.S. Command

Comments: Saigon (Washington Post) - The Saigon command announces certain details of the war, including allied casualty figures, will be withheld from the media.

### **Wednesday 28 February 1968**

Headline: Warplanes Pounding Reds U.S. Fighting In Laos

Comments: Three inch banner at top of front page of final edition. Earlier editions featured the headline "U.S. Planes Join Fighting In Laos" in one inch type under the masthead.

Headline: Hanoi Troops Hit Hard

Sub-heading: Ground Crews Call Strikes

Comments: Saigon (UPI, AP, New York Times) - American bombers sent to Laos to counter North Vietnamese infiltration.

Headline: TOUGH DALLAS SPEECH

Sub-heading: At Turning Point In War--LBJ

Comments: Dallas (Washington Post) - President Johnson tells crowd in Dallas (in his first visit since being sworn in that city) "...we stand at a turning point," from which there could be no retreat, and admonishes crowd that any weakening of the American will "would encourage the enemy and prolong the conflict."

#### **Thursday 29 February 1968**

Headline: AT KHE SANH

Sub-heading: Cong Blast Copter; 22 Yanks Die

Comments: Saigon (UPI) - As the siege of Khe Sanh continues 22 marines are killed when the Viet Cong shoot down helicopter. In Hue, the bodies of 100 more execution victims are discovered by South Vietnamese troops.

Headline: Viet War Strategy Reviewed

Comments: Washington (Washington Post) - Based on General Westmoreland's request for 100,000 to 200,000 additional troops, high government officials indicate that the Johnson administration would make a reappraisal of American military strategy in Vietnam.

(Source: San Jose Mercury and San Jose Mercury-News January 1, 1968 - February 29, 1968.)